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THE LOVE-MATCH.

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EMILY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE LOVE-MATCH.

CHAPTER I.

THE house at Wandesford was a very large and rather low building, occupying three sides of a square. That part of it which was inhabited by the family was separated from the rest by a long picture-gallery, the end window of which looked over the great gateway. Beyond it were the state rooms and those destined for visitors, while to the left lay the apartments occupied by Lady Brandon and her daughters. The rooms underneath were level with the ground, and the windows opened to a broad

stone terrace on which were placed, at intervals, statues, interspersed with antique vases filled with fragrant flowers.

Beyond the terrace the pleasure-ground, with its countless shrubs and brilliant flower-beds, sloped gradually off on one side until it lost itself beneath the shade of splendid oak and wide-spreading beech which united it to the dark forest beyond. All that side of the park was clothed in a rich mass of wood, crowning the summit of the hills which rose majestically in the distance.

The other side of the pleasure-ground opened gently down to a bright and rapid river that ran foaming and dashing over the wild rocks, which here and there intercepted its progress. Now and then this stream was half concealed from the eye by the overhanging of some magnificent old trees, and then again it burst upon the view, leaping and sparkling in the bright sunlight, as if rejoicing to have escaped from

the momentary shadow of the old oak-trees. The sound of the rushing water was just audible from the house, as standing on a glad summer's day beneath the shade of the verandah which surrounded the drawing-room windows, you could follow the bright course of the river, until it seemed but a shallow mountain-stream, dwindling at last to a fairy thread of silver, as it wound round the distant hills of the park.

That park, with its stately avenues and deep forest glades, where, for whole days you might dream away the hours, undisturbed by aught but the creations of fancy, was one of those magnificent possessions, which, to the mind of the careless observer, always associates itself with an idea of the happiness of the owner. It is difficult to look upon the touching beauty and grandeur of a fine old English park, and to enter the princely halls of a noble house, carefully preserved and handed down from generation to generation in all its original

splendour, and not to imagine that the natural possessors of all we so much admire must be perfectly happy. We forget as we gaze upon the bright relics of former days—as we listen to the traditions repeated for centuries and centuries, that those to whom they related were beings of a like mould to ourselves. Carried away by the enthusiasm which the recital of some noble deed excites, we indulge in the romantic visions of the past with which our mind is filled, and fancy that those so situated, so blessed with station, wealth, and power, must have been happy. And yet, perhaps, in those very halls has the low wail of the poor mourner broken upon the stillness of the night;—there, perhaps, has the fond mother wept over her dying child, and the youth of tender years followed to the grave his last and idolized parent;—there he has mourned with the bursting sorrow of an unworldly heart the blow which has made him lord of all around, and

gladly—too gladly would he have exchanged the wealth and honours which we have imagined so fraught with delight, for one dear smile from the cold and inanimate form before him.

As we gaze upon the picture-covered walls, and look with delight now on a mail-clad warrior's noble form, now on the bright-haired youth with laughing eyes and sunny brow, on the jewelled matron or the blushing girl, upon all of whom, in their turn, have descended the state and honours of their noble line, we scarcely remember to mingle with the feelings of pride and admiration which they inspire, the recollection that they were but as we are—creatures of an hour—things of little joy and much sorrow—beings of like affections to our own, whose short day of gladness may have been overcast in a moment, and whose sunlight of joy and pride may have been quenched in tears

of woe, and turned into night by some inward wretchedness, or the stroke of some household grief. We look upon them as they brightly shone in the hour of pride, and seldom reflect that the dark clouds of sorrow cast an equal shade over the hovel and the palace.

And here at Wandesford, how truly was this now felt by the fair and gentle being who looked with a tearful eye over the splendid scene before her! The mistress of that wide domain, the rich, the envied Lady Brandon, leaned from the window of the picture-gallery, and gazed intently, not on the beauty of the prospect, not on the grandeur of her own possessions, but on one small speck which gradually became smaller and smaller, till at last it vanished from her sight. It was the carriage that bore away her child—her Florence—her idolized daughter; and long after it had passed from

her sight, did she continue to watch, as if in hopes something might again bring it to her view, for the sound of the rolling wheels still grated freshly on her ear, as if they had but that moment swept over the ground beneath the window where she stood.

Long did Lady Brandon watch, but in vain; and as she turned from the window, the bright sunshine, which burst through the coloured panes and lighted up the long gallery with a thousand rainbow hues, struck upon her heart, and redoubled the chill which had already settled there, as if in prophetic terror of the future.

Lady Brandon was kind and yielding, even to a fault. She had parted with her daughter against her own wish; but seeing that Florence really appeared desirous of accompanying her cousin to Scotland, she could not find courage to refuse her what appeared so simple a request.

It was the first time that Florence had ever left her mother. Lady Brandon had never before deviated from the rule she had laid down of never allowing her children to go away from her. It was not that she distrusted them, but Lady Brandon knew that a girl is never in a really respectable or advantageous position who is intrusted to the care of those who have no real interest in her welfare. A very young girl cannot have sufficient knowledge of the world to guide or protect herself in general society. If she should be possessed of such knowledge, it has probably been attained by an experience to which ignorance would be far preferable, and those who have never quitted a mother's side cannot be sufficiently grateful for such a blessing.

The announcement of Lady Marwood's departure had been so sudden, that there had not been time for Lady Brandon to explain

to Sir William the variety of doubts and fears that agitated her. It would have been difficult for her to have actually reduced them into form, but at her first mention of danger to Florence, Sir William had appeared so angry that she had not dared to continue the subject. There was a sternness about him upon any point where his pride was touched that awed the gentle nature of his wife. He would not hear of the possibility of any danger to a daughter of the house of Brandon. He looked upon the very name as a safeguard; and, perhaps, one reason that he was so blind to the utter heartlessness of his sister and his niece was, that the blood of the Brandons flowed in their veins.

Never was the pride of ancestry more inherent in any one than in Sir William Brandon. Though he loved his beautiful daughter with the deepest affection, still it was mingled with the same haughty pride

which he felt for all his race, and with a noble confidence that prevented him from entering into those feelings which so painfully disturbed the anxious mind of her mother.

At all times a mother's love is ready to take alarm, and especially if the object of her affection is removed from her care; but the sorrow of Lady Brandon far exceeded such a feeling. Silenced, but not convinced, she had parted from her favourite child, and her spirit seemed weighed down by sorrow at having consented to the separation. She looked around, and one feeling alone seemed to prey upon her very heart. Florence was gone!

And then, the poor mother, sad and tearful, visited the room of her darling child, but her own deep sigh of grief was the only sound of life that met her ear. She sat down upon the sofa where for many days she had

watched the lovely form so dear to her. Alas! when should she behold it there again?

The morning breeze blew freshly in at the open casement, and as it swept across the strings of the harp which stood near it, they gave back a sad and moaning sound. It was as if they sighed for the hand which had left them. Lady Brandon trembled as the sound reached her ear, and she hastily placed a cover over the instrument. And yet she loved it, for it spoke to her of her child, and all in that little room seemed that morning to have grown doubly precious to her, for her yearning heart could not find rest, and so deep and anxious was her love, that its very strength was misery, for in its tender and intense forethought it told of coming sorrow.

CHAPTER II.

IN the meantime Florence was pursuing her journey. At first her feelings upon leaving her home had been so overcoming as to attract the attention of Lady Marwood; and she had been obliged to undergo many remarks, the coldness and heartless tone of which certainly did not tend to reconcile her to having left her mother's side. But Lady Julia soon came to her assistance, and the natural kind feelings of Florence were easily worked upon, when she imagined that her conduct was a source of pain or discomfort to those around her.

By degrees Florence recovered her spirits,

and Lady Marwood her good-humour, which had been sadly deranged by what she called the ridiculous "sentimentality of Florence."

It was towards evening, on the third day of their journey, that they entered the gates of Marwood. Florence had never been at the Castle; indeed, during the long minority of the present Earl, it had scarcely ever been inhabited, except for a few weeks at a time, when Lady Marwood found it better to endure the dulness of a country life than to live at the rate she generally contrived to do in town. But now every thing wore its brightest colours, and Lady Marwood was delighted to have some one upon whom to impress an idea of her grandeur. She pointed out to Florence as they passed through the park all the different beauties which she fancied would particularly engage her attention.

Florence looked, and admired, and listened to

all that Lady Marwood, with a most happy confusion of dates and names, was endeavouring to make her understand ; but it was not until she came within view of the Castle, that any genuine burst of admiration reached the longing ear of Lady Marwood.

The park, though old and fine, presented none of the varied beauties of Wandesford, nor could it compare with it in size ; but the Castle was beautiful — one of the fine old castles of the feudal times, with moat and drawbridge, and frowning battlements and towers. It had always been kept up in as perfect a state of preservation as was possible, and nothing about it presented any of that new or restored look which so completely destroys the illusion that carries us back to the days of old.

The carriage drew up at an outer gate, and though an entrance could have been effected at another part of the building, yet it had always been the custom to use only that at which Flo-

rence, with Lady Marwood and her daughter, now alighted.

To reach the rooms which were usually inhabited, they crossed the inner court. The silence of this large enclosure, the extreme beauty of the architecture, and the fine old windows, with their countless panes, riveted the attention of Florence, who gazed about her with the wonder and curiosity of a child. But when they entered the old hall, she was speechless from mingled delight and surprise. Its immense length and the stupendous height of the roof filled her with a sensation almost of awe.

This hall had been preserved exactly in its original state. At one end was the dais, with its long oaken table—the board where many a noble knight had sat and many a lovely lady smiled, who now slept in the silence of the tomb. Around the hall were placed enormous tables, of the same description, where those of a lower grade had ever found a welcome place.

At the other end was a music-gallery, and around the walls, among trophies of the chase and numerous relics of ancient armour, might be seen the armorial bearings of the owners of the Castle ; while the pennons of the ancient tributary knights floated from above, and gave a still greater air of antiquity to the building. A pile of fagots blazed in the centre of the hall, and lighted up every corner of it.

Florence was almost overcome with delight. Having scarcely ever left her home, she had had no opportunity of seeing any thing that so exactly coincided with her ideas of an ancient castle ; but now they were at once realized. Her first impression was that of extreme surprise at the coolness of Lady Julia's answers to her expressions of rapture.

“ How could you,” exclaimed Florence, “ have been born here, lived here, and yet never once have told me what it was like ? ”

“ Oh ! I detest every thing about it ! I never

should have thought of talking of such a gloomy old place!" was Lady Julia's reply.

"Dear Julia! how can you say so? The very gloom, as you call it, adds a charm to it. Look!" exclaimed Florence, as she turned to the window,—“only look at the beautiful stillness of the old grey turrets in the fading light—the peaceful look of yonder tower, with its heavy-arched gateway, shewing the immense thickness of the massy walls, all telling of power, yet hushed in silence and repose, like the calm sleep of some mighty giant! Julia, only look!—is it not beautiful?"

"Oh, no!" said Julia, drawing her shawl closely round her; "I don't see any thing wonderful in it. I dare say the Castle is well enough, but I always feel as if I was in a prison. For Heaven's sake, Florence! do you mean to stand shivering in that window all the evening? I cannot bear the draught of this great staring hall. Do come to the drawing-room!"

“One moment, dear Julia,—do let me look round the hall—just once. Oh, I could stay here for ever!” murmured Florence, as if thinking aloud.

“You will be sick of it soon enough, I can tell you,” said Julia: “the very staircases are enough to dislocate one’s joints, and turn one’s head giddy, and Marwood insists on their not being altered. However, I am happy to say we shall not be here long.”

How different were the sensations of Florence! Lady Julia did not give her time for further conversation, but began rapidly to ascend the beautiful spiral stairs which led to the drawing-room. It must be allowed that the steps were rather steep, but the dark and time-worn stone was covered with the softest carpet, whose richness might have atoned to the delicate feet of Lady Julia for the necessity of any little extra exertion.

The stairs terminated at the entrance of a

room of magnificent proportions. Formerly it had been used as a ball-room, and the old-fashioned crystal chandeliers still hung in their original places. Florence had only just time to observe that the walls were covered with tapestry, still retaining much of the brightness of former days, as Lady Julia hurried her across the room, and opening a door at the farther end, in another moment they found themselves in the drawing-room, where Lady Marwood, reposing in a luxurious arm-chair, was already engaged in reading sundry notes and letters which lay upon the table before her.

“Are there any letters for me, mamma?” peevishly inquired Lady Julia, as she entered the room.

“Yes, my dear, there are several. I don’t know where I have put them,” said Lady Marwood, carelessly turning over the confused heap of papers before her. “Oh, there is one—and here are two more. I can’t think how people

could have found out we were coming here. Really, Julia, I would not have as many correspondents as you have for the world. I hope you never write to gentlemen. I consider it extremely improper for girls to do so ;” and Lady Marwood took up a newspaper.

“ I shall write to any one I please,” said Lady Julia, with an air of decision that startled Florence.

“ You always will go your own way, I know,” replied Lady Marwood, who, except when it interfered with her own amusements, seldom took any pains to prevent it: “ but I must say I think young ladies, nowadays, have very little regard for their reputation. That system of letter-writing, and receiving visits from gentlemen in their own sitting-room, is perfectly new. In my time such a thing never was thought of.”

“ I dare say not,” observed Lady Julia, contemptuously, “ but the world is very different now. Do you suppose it was always intended

to stand still, so as to suit itself exactly to all the old-fashioned prejudices of the Brandons? — I beg your pardon, Florence,” continued she, suddenly recollecting herself, “but, really, mamma thinks no one is even to do any thing but what she used to do herself.—Perhaps, mamma,” she added, playfully, turning to Lady Marwood, “you would like Florence and me to appear in one of those high ruffs and long-peaked bodies which look so comfortable upon the pictures in the gallery. At all events, we should be stiff enough then to please you.”

“How can you talk such nonsense, Julia? You always turn every thing I say into a joke. But I am very serious about one thing. Remember, if I am what you call stiff, Marwood is ten times more so; and I beg, when he comes home, you will keep all your new-fashioned ideas to yourself. I do not want to quarrel with him about such nonsense.”

Lady Julia was attentively reading a very

long letter, which bore a foreign post-mark. She had not listened to a word of her mother's exhortation, but it appeared that her ear had caught the sound of her brother's name, for she suspended for a moment the perusal of her letter, as she hastily inquired,—

“ My brother ! what of him ? ”

“ I was only saying, that when he comes, you must study to please him, and therefore I hope you will make a point of being up in time to attend prayers in the chapel. You know he always wishes it ; and, really, my health does not admit of my going to that cold, dismal end of the Castle ; but you who are young and strong must contrive to manage it.”

Lady Julia did not answer. She was again absorbed by her letter, and Florence, who had felt rather uncomfortable during the dialogue which had been carried on between her aunt and cousin, so different in its tone from the kind and gentle words with which any reproof

her own dear mother might think necessary to administer was always tempered; had withdrawn to a large oriel window at the end of the room, and continued gazing upon the scene without, which was now rapidly fading in the approaching twilight.

Poor Florence! she thought of her home, of her sisters, of her doating parents, and their happy fireside; she felt as if she had been away for an age, and already longed for the moment when she should be once again at Wandesford. Tears fell fast from her eyes, as she recalled to mind the sadness of her parting with them, and even, after the last embrace—the last word of fondness, how her poor mother had hurried to the window of the gallery, that she might see her for a moment longer, even from a distance.

Florence had leaned from the carriage-window, till the last glimpse of that pale sad face had been lost to her; but the grieving tenderness of her mother's look had entered into her heart,

and now she bitterly reproached herself for having shewn such eagerness to accompany her cousin. Not a word of objection or remonstrance had been uttered by that fond mother; but Florence well remembered the silence of her sorrow, and how deeply she had felt her departure, and, stung with remorse for the cruelty of having caused her a moment's pain, Florence hated herself for the selfishness of which she had been guilty. It was too late now to retract; but she resolved that, when once this visit was over, she never again would leave her own home, or sacrifice to others a moment of that time which should have been devoted to one who valued it so highly.

Sad and silent, Florence continued for some time lost in her own reflections, until the voice of her cousin recalled to her the necessity of controlling the emotion under which she laboured. Lady Julia appeared suddenly to have recovered her good-humour, and, as she led

Florence to her room, the affectionate tone in which she addressed her, and her gentle caress at parting, served a little to restore the spirits of the agitated girl, whose heart ever warmed with gratitude at the least word of kindness.

Florence hastened to dress, and joined Lady Marwood in the drawing-room, at the moment when a tall, venerable-looking man, in black, had just entered from an opposite door. Lady Marwood immediately presented him to Florence as Dr. Sands. He had been Lord Marwood's tutor, and was now his domestic chaplain.

As this person seated himself by Lady Marwood's side, and began to make inquiries about his pupil, whom he had always looked upon as his own child, Florence had full leisure to examine and admire the extraordinary charm of his countenance and manner. He appeared scarcely to have reached his fiftieth year, yet his hair was quite white, and he wore it in a sort

of old-fashioned way, parted in the middle, above his fine open forehead, and hanging low down on each side. The calm and thoughtful look of the high, intellectual brow might, perhaps, have given too grave an expression, had it not been lighted up by a smile of such peculiar sweetness, that it seemed as if a ray of holiness beamed from that good man's face, as he looked kindly on those around.

Florence gazed upon him with delight. She felt comforted in his presence. There was so much meekness and benevolence, and, at the same time, such chastened joyousness in his manner, that it drew her at once towards him; and she felt, before she had been an hour in his company, as if she could have loved him with the affection of a child.

His devotion to Lord Marwood appeared unbounded. He had been his companion since his childhood. Having lost his father at a very early age, Lord Marwood looked up to and

loved his tutor with the duty and affection of a son. Dr. Sands had accompanied him when he first went abroad ; but, in consequence of a severe domestic affliction, had been obliged to return to England almost a year before the expiration of the young earl's minority : and the good old man now hailed his arrival with a delight as vivid and true as did Lord Marwood himself.

Florence was charmed with the manner in which Dr. Sands spoke of his " dear boy," as he called him. It was so naturally affectionate, so unmingled with even a shade of flattery or servile praise, that she felt how truly it came from the heart of the speaker ; and every moment she grew more and more interested in him.

It was another cause of surprise to Florence, that neither from Lady Marwood nor Lady Julia had she ever heard the name of one who appeared to fill so important a station in their family. But Lady Marwood very seldom took

the trouble of talking to a girl ; and Lady Julia so cordially included her brother's tutor in the general hatred she bestowed upon every thing at Marwood, that it was not at all astonishing that she should not have deemed his merits a sufficiently agreeable topic of conversation to enlarge upon.

Florence was pained by the expression of her cousin's manner to Dr. Sands. The coldness and flippancy with which she frequently answered his remarks were most distressing to Florence ; and she fancied that, in the kind humility with which he spoke to her, Lady Julia must feel rebuked for her ungraciousness ; and she scarcely ventured to look at her, when upon one or two occasions this had been particularly apparent.

But Florence was mistaken when she judged of her cousin's character by her own. To Lady Julia it was a matter of perfect indifference whether Dr. Sands was pleased with what she

• condescended to say or not. She was more than usually spiteful against him, for she could well at that moment have dispensed with his presence at the Castle ; and as he had been from home for some time before, she had arrived in the full expectation of finding that he was still absent. However, as it was a misfortune over which she had no control, Lady Julia determined to make the best of it, and, at all events, to take care that he should in no way interfere to mar any of her proceedings, by becoming too intimately acquainted with Florence. She saw instantly how probable this might be, and resolved most vigilantly to guard against it.

CHAPTER III.

“MY dear Florence, you will be moped to death in this old, haunted place,” said Lady Julia, as she met her cousin the next morning quietly sauntering through the pleasure-ground.

“Do not think so, Julia; I assure you you are quite mistaken,” replied Florence. “I have explored every corner and turret of your beautiful castle to-day, and I am delighted with it. I mean to make sketches of the most striking parts of it, and take them home with me.”

“Still you cannot draw all day long, and we might live here for ever without seeing a

soul, except that most respectable man Dr. Sands. I wish we had some visitors."

"You will soon have your brother," observed Florence.

"Oh! that is worse than nothing. He is a mere boy too;— *à propos*, suppose he falls in love with you, Florence; how should you like that? You admire the Castle so much; how well you would look as *châtelaine*!"

"I have no ambition of the sort," said Florence, with a sigh.

"Well, perhaps you would like a cottage better, with ivy, or roses and honeysuckle all over it, and a dear, tender, affectionate curate for your husband, and half-a-dozen squalling things with purple cheeks and white hair for your children. What do you say, Florence? shall I transfer the affections of my consumptive-looking Pembury conquest to you? I have no doubt we might manage it."

"What a wild creature you are!" said Flo-

rence, smiling in spite of the recollections the idea of marriage always conjured up even more vividly than usual.

“Well, after all, I do not think one’s house does signify so very much,” replied Julia, “provided the person it belongs to is exactly all one likes. What can it signify?”

“Not much, I should think,” said Florence, in a low voice. She had not remarked the extreme inconsistency which marked the present and past opinions of her cousin.

“An agreeable companion is the first thing,” resumed Julia; “and that is only to be met with in a man of the world. A stupid idiot who has never gone beyond his own domain is not likely to enliven one’s long winter evenings; but the worst of it is, those men of the world are never rich.”

“Why not?” asked Florence, with an air of simplicity, which almost overturned the gravity of her cousin.

“Oh, because — because, I don’t know how it is; they travel about so much, and frequent such expensive society, and then their taste is so refined. But,” continued Lady Julia, who was beginning to be rather at a loss for good reasons wherewith to impose upon the credulity of her hearer, “do not say any thing about it to mamma, and I will read you the most charming letter from our friend Gerald De Grey.”

Lady Julia pretended to look in her bag for a letter, which she well knew had long since perished in the flames of her dressing-room fire; but she had perfectly seen the start of Florence and the burning blush which tinged her cheek.

“How provoking!” she continued; “I must have left it at home. But do not ask me for it before mamma, for she is so full of prejudices it is quite ridiculous. You always correspond with gentlemen,—do you not, Florence?”

“Never,” said Florence. “What can you write about?”

“Oh, a thousand things!—all the news of the day. Men are much greater gossips in reality than we are. I delight in their letters. Should you not like to get letters every day from the most agreeable as well as clever men of the day?”

“Me—oh no!” replied Florence. “I know so few gentlemen; and besides, I could never bring myself to write my real thoughts and feelings to a man I scarcely knew.”

“Nonsense, Florence. You are so very childish: but you forget I and Gerald are the oldest friends—I look upon him just like a brother.”

“Is he—is he come back? Is he in England, I mean?” at last stammered Florence, forgetting what an extraordinary effect her embarrassment must have upon her cousin.

“Oh, yes! he never went abroad. But I

forgot," continued Lady Julia, without appearing to notice the manner of Florence, "you were taken ill just at the moment when he was obliged to go suddenly to town. His mother, it seems, was very unwell, and wished him to take her to London to consult her physician. You know what an affectionate son he is."

"His mother!" exclaimed Florence, with a sigh so deep, that for a moment she could not say more. It seemed to her as if the weight of a mountain had been taken from her heart; the earth, the air, had suddenly cleared, as though a curtain had been drawn up which had hitherto shut them from her view; and with her whole countenance radiant with joy, Florence seized the hand of her perfidious cousin, and pressed it within her own.

"Oh! she is better now — quite well indeed, I believe," said Lady Julia, pretending not to understand the emotion of Florence. "I never saw Mrs. De Grey — what is she like?"

“She is a most charming person; how you would like her, Julia, if you knew her!” said Florence, with enthusiasm.

“Gerald talks of her as if she were an angel. How fond she must be of him — an only child too — and so handsome!”

Florence did not answer.

“I think, of all the men I have ever seen,” continued Lady Julia, “he is the most attractive. There are plenty of handsome men in the world, but they always look to me with their curled hair and pink cheeks like the things in a hair-dresser’s shop. But his beauty is so different. He looks manly and graceful in every thing he does. There never was any thing so distinguished as his air. Do you not think so? But, perhaps, you do not admire him, as you have known him ever since you were born. One gets used to people who are always with us, until one never thinks of their appearance.”

“Oh, yes! I do think him all that you say — that is, very good-looking,” answered Florence, turning away her face.

“Well, I am glad you approve of my taste. I never admired any one so much. I am sure I wish he was here instead of that boring old Dr. Sands — I hate clergymen!”

“But he seems so kind — so very kind,” observed Florence; “just a sort of person one must love. How can you say you hate him, Julia? I am sure you cannot mean it!”

“Oh, no! — I was only joking; — he is not worth hating. But you will allow Gerald would be rather more amusing of an evening; and then we might have some music. How splendidly he sings! After all, there is nothing like singing. I wonder all men do not learn it, if it was only for the pleasure of singing with the women they are in love with; it must be so delicious — so entrancing!” exclaimed Lady

Julia, casting up her eyes with a sentimental air.

Florence only answered by a gentle sigh. She did not yet dare to speak of Gerald; but Lady Julia seemed determined to save her the trouble, for she continued, with increasing animation,—

“When one compares such a creature as Gerald with the wretched animals who call themselves men, how odious they appear! how insignificant, as they stand beside a glorious, intellectual, cultivated being like that — so wonderfully gifted, that it seems as if he had been sent to wander over the earth, as a solitary specimen of the perfection of human nature.”

“How eloquent you are, Julia!” said Florence, who, though she could have worshipped her cousin for the words she had spoken, yet felt the least possible tinge of jealousy at hearing Gerald so warmly praised by another woman.

“So would you be if you were not so cold ; but I really believe, Florence, you are an icicle — or, perhaps, you do not think it proper to praise gentlemen.”

“Surely there cannot be impropriety in acknowledging one’s admiration of any very superior distinction, whether of talent or beauty. At least, I do not think there can be,” said Florence, with a timid look, as if doubting her own opinion.

“Impropriety! — really the word appears to be a ‘goodly heritage’ in the Brandon family. You are always talking of impropriety, as if there was nothing else in the world ; while the fact is, there are very few things improper, if they are done in a ladylike manner, and a due regard to other people’s fancies.”

“What can you mean?” said Florence, with a wondering look.

“Why, I mean that when people do not like things, it is much better to keep them to one-

self, and not make quarrels upon points where they cannot agree. Provided they know nothing about it, what harm can it do them?"

"But when you are certain they would object, if they did know it, surely it is equally wrong—more wrong even it seems to me—to persist, for it is adding deception to one's first fault."

"Then you would quietly sacrifice your whole life and happiness to study the foolish whims of other people, who always have some reason of their own for contradicting one."

"But suppose, Julia, one's parents objected to any thing one particularly wished;—they must be better able to judge of what is right," said Florence, who very naturally applied the reasoning of her cousin to her own case.

"As to that, it is a matter of course that one's parents always contradict one—old people do so delight in shewing their authority. They cannot bear to give it up, even when we

are old enough to know much better what is good for us than they can. I never should think of implicit obedience, if it was on any important point. It is all very well in trifles. It is just as well to give up in them, for one always gets one's own way in great things."

"You would not really do so!" exclaimed Florence; "no pleasure, no happiness could ever atone for having caused a moment's sorrow to a mother's heart—oh, it would be too dreadful!—too terrible to bear!—you could not do such a thing, Julia," she added, looking imploringly into her cousin's face, as the thought of her own mother, and the unhappy look, which was the last she had seen upon her countenance, rushed to her mind, and filled her eyes with tears.

"What a child you are, Florence!" said Julia, contemptuously; "most certainly, if it was any thing I really cared about, I should do just as I pleased. I think I am a much

better judge of what would make my own happiness, than persons can be who have worn out all the young affections of their hearts. I never should think of consulting mamma upon some points—that of marriage, for instance. I should please myself, and she would infallibly come round to my way of thinking, before six months were over—people always do. They only make a show of resistance just by way of example, in case they have other children. But there is the carriage already, and we have forgotten our luncheon; I will join you directly, if you will go into the dining-room.”

And Lady Julia hurried away, in the hope that the poison she had taken so much pains to instil might gradually settle, and spread its influence over the mind and character of Florence.

This was the first time Lady Julia had ventured to speak so openly; the first time Gerald's name had been mentioned between

them; and the effect the conversation had produced upon the mind of Florence was that of excessive joy on the one hand; while on the other, a restless sense of dissatisfaction with herself seemed to weigh down the spirits which were ready to soar above all other cares, now that she knew Gerald to be clear of the imputation which had been cast upon him. She almost forgot her own grief in the unspeakable happiness of knowing his innocence.

To question the truth of Lady Julia's statement with regard to Mrs. De Grey's journey to London never occurred to Florence. Her mind was full of perplexity. Gerald was still in England. What could have been the cause of his having changed his plans? But then, again, a sudden chill came over the heart of Florence. She remembered his last words on that dreadful day which she scarcely dared to think of; and the bitter feeling of humiliation for a moment overwhelmed all others, and the burning tear of shame started to her eyes.

Of her cousin's conversation Florence retained a very indistinct idea. But one part of it had arrested her attention. Still, from the constant indirect insinuations of the same kind, which Lady Julia daily and hourly contrived to pour into her ear, the mind of Florence was not so entirely free from a vague feeling of doubt as it once had been. The fatal influence of so detestable a character as that of Lady Julia over a young and inexperienced girl, began imperceptibly to work its way, and, deceived by the warmth of her professions into a belief of the sincerity of her affection, the trusting heart of Florence became every day more attached to her cousin.

Some time had passed since their arrival at Marwood Castle, without producing any event which could particularly distinguish one day from another. Still Lady Julia did not for a moment relax in her attentions to Florence. But her utmost vigilance could not avert the very circumstance she had from the first mo-

ment dreaded as most inimical to her designs. She found it impossible to prevent the growing intimacy between Dr. Sands and Florence. In vain did she endeavour to monopolize the whole time and attention of the latter. Florence was always ready to accompany her cousin in her rides and drives, but often, when she had with great care arranged some excursion which should occupy the whole of the following day, and in which Florence was to be her only companion, she would find to her extreme mortification, that by the time she had emerged from her dressing-room, her cousin had, perhaps, under the protection of the good old chaplain, made a tour of the park, or spent the morning in examining and admiring the antiquities of the Castle, and exploring its innermost recesses.

But it was in listening to the kind and cheerful words of Dr. Sands, that Florence found even a greater pleasure than in admiring

a scene which was so new to her, and so congenial to her taste, and to the innate love of the beautiful, which she so eminently possessed. The almost paternal language in which he addressed her, was comforting to one whose heart yearned for the tenderness of which now, for the first time, she was deprived. She was warmly attached to her cousin, but it was as if she was spell-bound by her, more than the fond doating love with which she regarded those whom she had left. Deceived by the superficial jargon of Lady Julia, she imagined her to be much more clever than she really was; and there was a sensation of humility, a fear of sarcasm or ridicule that often prevented her from openly contradicting opinions which in secret her heart disavowed.

Lady Julia was perfectly aware of the advantage she had gained, but trembled lest Florence should render all her exertions of no avail by some ill-timed confidence towards her

new friend. That confidence, however, formed no part of the interest with which Florence listened to his conversation. She rarely spoke of herself. When she did do so, it was with a distrust that enchanted the good Dr. Sands. He was charmed with her simplicity, her ingenuousness, and the natural clearness of her judgment. Not having known her before, he could not judge of the present by the past, and saw not the sorrow with which she was oppressed.

Already the good old man was revolving a scheme in his mind, which appeared to him as easy of accomplishment as it was desirable to effect. This was the marriage of Florence with his favourite, the young Earl of Marwood. The more he saw of her, the more convinced he was, that she would make the happiness of any one whom she regarded with a preference, and, in the simplicity of his heart, he never imagined it possible but that

so amiable and superior a young man as he knew Lord Marwood to be, should be preferred to all others.

Upon this point, if Dr. Sands might be somewhat more sanguine than one more conversant with the world and society would perhaps have deemed prudent, yet it was almost the only one upon which his judgment was likely to err. To a highly cultivated mind, he joined a heart that might be truly said to be religious. Not that religion which is made up of forms, in which the heart has no share, and which is so frequently adopted when other excitements have palled upon the sense, or is used as a safety-valve for the superabundance of that egregious vanity under which so many labour, when no other means of distinction are available.

Religion is also too often made a cloak for detraction, for petty spite, and a plausible pretext for displaying to the world the sins and

backslidings of others. The religion of Dr. Sands was not of this nature. It was the simple, fervent feeling of gratitude to heaven, and charity and kindness to his fellow-creatures. He had not lived in the day when it was deemed righteous to go about proclaiming one's own goodness,—when a few conventional rules were ostentatiously adhered to, and called religion,—when the votaries of pleasure, having exhausted all other sources of excitement during the six days of the week, singled out the seventh in order to commit the *new* sin of endeavouring to make religion a *fashion*.

On the other hand, Dr. Sands was also as far removed from those who wish to make religion a thing of terror, and this life a scene of penance and privation, as he was from the careless follower or the scoffing disbeliever. His religion was a guiding principle, not a boasting profession. He could scarcely have understood upon what foundation was based a

religion like that of many in the present day, when so much is done for effect, and when such little good result arises from it. The cant of hypocrisy may pass current with some few for a moment, but it cannot warp the judgment of the sound observer, who sees in it but what it is—a mere device to attract notice. The idle, the flippant, and the vain, who constitute the frothy portion of society, have no other object than to prevent themselves from sinking into the obscurity which would infallibly be their portion, did they attempt to support themselves by the strength of their virtues, or the depth of their knowledge. Ambitious to flutter constantly on the surface of the world, they are obliged to have recourse to every juggling art which may attract attention, and prolong their butterfly existence; and, having pretty nearly exhausted all others, they seize upon religion as an auxiliary, and in the hope of its answering

so base a purpose, hesitate not to pervert its noble ends, and to degrade and profane what should be held sacred.

It was only necessary to look upon the face of Dr. Sands, to see that his religion was one of peace and holy joy. It might well have been said of him, "that he went about doing good." His gentle and unaffected piety, his silent and well-directed benevolence told in their effects; for wherever his step had passed, the rich respected, and the poor loved him.

CHAPTER IV.

“I WONDER how you will like Marwood,” said Lady Julia to her cousin, as they were walking together on the terrace, on the morning of the day when he was expected to arrive at the Castle.

“His being your brother, dear Julia, would be sufficient to ensure my liking him, even if his own merits were not as great as they are represented to be.”

“Do you really love me so much, Florence?” inquired Julia.

“Yes, indeed, I do,” replied Florence, taking her hand. “How can I do otherwise? You have been so very kind to me ;

and especially since I came here; though I am afraid I have been but a dull companion, for you know I have never left mamma before, and at first I felt unhappy, even though with you."

Lady Julia felt a little uncomfortable from the emotion with which these words were uttered by Florence. She had hoped that her cousin's fond recollections of home had somewhat cooled since she had been under her tuition.

"Thank you, dear Florence, for your kind words; rest assured," she continued, with a grave and sentimental air, "that my only wish is for your happiness. I would give any thing to see you restored to what you once were. I am sometimes afraid that you are not happy—not comfortable; and I would do any thing on earth to make you so."

"Dear—dear Julia, do not speak so kindly to me," said Florence, whose eyes had filled

with tears. "I am very happy ; far more so than I deserve," she added, in a lower voice.

"How can you be so foolish, dearest?" returned Julia. "What is there you do not deserve? What is there you have not a perfect right to in the world? It is quite ridiculous to suppose otherwise. Now, do not cry, and spoil your face, just as my brother arrives. I have set my heart on your making a conquest of him, and then I should have you for a sister."

"When do you think he will be here?" said Florence, not choosing to reply to her cousin's last remark.

"Oh! not before the evening, I suppose. The people have insisted on going to meet him, and that will delay his arrival. What shall we do? Shall we ride out the way he is to come, and see him drawn home in triumph? or shall we undergo the ceremony of mamma and the family coach?"

“I think,” replied Florence, “it would be more agreeable to remain at home. I feel rather nervous at the thoughts of the crowd and the noise. I scarcely think I should like to venture.”

“Very well, just as you please. Suppose we walk round the lawn and look at the spot where the tents are to be placed. I expect it will have a very good effect when the people are all assembled under the old trees.”

The cousins proceeded as Lady Julia had proposed; and, having inspected all the preparations that were in a sufficient state of forwardness, they extended their walk to some distance, and did not return to the house until the hour when Lady Julia had calculated upon finding it deserted.

At Lady Julia's instigation Lady Marwood had set out, intending to drive some little distance to meet her son, and Dr. Sands had accompanied her. This was Lady Julia's

chief anxiety. Each day brought with it the increasing difficulty of preventing his being constantly thrown into the society of Florence. Having ascertained that for the moment he was safely disposed of, Lady Julia withdrew to her own room, where the duties of her extensive correspondence usually occupied her; and Florence resolved to devote the time, which was thus granted to her, to writing an unusually long letter to her mother and sisters.

The kindness with which her cousin had spoken to her had more than ever awakened thoughts of home in the mind of Florence. She actually reproached herself for having experienced a moment of real gladness since she had left it; and now she gave way to her feelings in such an outpouring of affectionate solicitude and tenderness that between the length of her letter and the emotion which her own thoughts frequently called forth, she had only

just concluded when Lady Julia entered her room hurriedly, exclaiming, —

“They are coming, Florence! the crowd has just entered the park-gates. Let us go up to an upper window, and we shall have a full view of the procession.”

Florence instantly complied with her cousin's request. For herself she could feel but little interest in the matter, but the pleasure of others was always a matter of consideration to her, and she followed Lady Julia up-stairs, and took her station at a window which commanded a view of the road leading to the great gateway.

Florence could not long look upon the scene without, and remain an uninterested spectator. There is something inexpressibly touching in the demonstration of public joy, particularly when it seems to flow from so natural an impulse of the heart, as the affection which generally subsists between a large

body of tenantry and their landlord. The applause that is bestowed by assembled multitudes on other occasions is of a nature widely differing from this, and does not sink into our hearts, and dwell there with a remembrance so sweet, as the lively and honest joy with which we behold the lord of an ancient house welcomed to his home by crowds of attached and affectionate dependants. There is a familiar and household feeling which comes home to every breast in witnessing the display of this strong and genuine proof of unity and attachment; and Florence, the child of Nature, ever alive to the impulse of all that was true and heartfelt, experienced so deep an emotion upon beholding the enthusiasm of the assembled multitude, that, unable to restrain her feelings, she burst into tears.

Lady Julia, in whose breast the passing scene excited no other feeling than that of a

mean jealousy towards her brother, bent a searching look upon Florence, but she was soon persuaded that she was merely overcome by the noise and bustle of the crowd, as Florence, smiling through her tears, endeavoured to subdue her agitation, and turned again to the window.

Lady Marwood led the way in her coach, with all its proper attendants, preceded and followed by outriders, while the beautiful prancing horses, covered with blue ribands, could scarcely be restrained to a pace that suited the slow advance of so large a body of people. Lady Marwood, bowing and smiling, seemed quite ready to appropriate the greatest part of the applause to herself, while the benevolent countenance of Dr. Sands, who sat beside her, beamed with happiness at beholding the reception of his pupil.

The carriage of Lord Marwood followed. but it was so closely hemmed in by the sur-

rounding crowd, both on foot and on horse-back, that it was impossible to catch a glimpse of its inmates. It was only by the repeated cheers of the crowd, and the waving of the banners and flags ornamented with blue streamers, that Florence knew that the owner of the Castle had once more re-entered its halls, for the carriages were hidden by the projection of the large oriel window above the gateway.

Lady Julia proposed going down to meet her brother; and Florence, nervous and excited by the scene which had so deeply affected her, followed her cousin to the great hall, from whence issued the sound of merry voices: the fire blazed joyously upon the hearth, and as Lord Marwood pressed forward to receive his sister, the group which stood around divided, and the first figure on which the eye of Florence rested was that of Gerald De Grey.

“ You have not seen Florence,” exclaimed Lady Julia, disengaging herself from her brother’s embrace, and hastily turning to seek for her. But Florence had retreated behind the crowd which had now nearly filled the hall, and, pale and almost breathless, was leaning against a pillar. Lady Julia drew her arm through her own, and without appearing to observe her agitation, said,—

“ Come, dear Florence, and tell Marwood you are the little girl who used to play with him so many years ago. Come, we can get through the crowd now; and he has brought down Gerald De Grey to enliven us, which, I am sure, is a good thing.”

And Lady Julia dragged the reluctant Florence forward into the blazing light to be looked at by her cousin, and told how long it was since they had met, and all the things that are usually said on such occasions.

Of all this Florence scarcely heard a word.

She tried to answer mechanically, but she trembled so much, that she actually clung to her cousin's arm as she stood by her. Soon, however, her senses returned—soon it appeared to her that, amidst the din of voices which made the hall re-echo to their sound, one only was audible. Gerald was by her side, and the low soft words which he addressed to her restored, as if by magic, her self-possession.

The rapture which filled her whole being could not be concealed. As with a timid look she raised her eyes to Gerald's, such a thrill of joy filled her heart, that all her sorrow was for the moment forgotten—all his coldness, all his ill-usage vanished from her recollection, in the delight of beholding him once more, and of feeling that of his own free-will he had again sought her society.

Fortunately for Florence Mr. De Grey was

rather better skilled in the art of suppressing any emotion which might happen to agitate his breast than she was, otherwise the whole party must have been speedily informed of what it had cost Florence so much pains hitherto to conceal. But by degrees the complete self-possession which Mr. De Grey exhibited, communicated itself in some degree to the agitated girl, and she was enabled, before the evening was over, to look round with a little more confidence, and even to examine the handsome countenance of her new cousin, Lord Marwood, whom she never remembered having seen before, though she was told that they had been great friends as children.

At first Florence could not admire Lord Marwood. His style of beauty was so exactly opposite to that which was the standard of perfection to her eyes, that she could not reconcile herself to the fair curling hair and

laughing blue eyes of her cousin. Before long, however, she was obliged to do justice to the excessive charm of manner which so distinguished him. There was a joyous frankness in all he said and did; which, joined to great refinement of tone and manner, was irresistible. It seemed to come from his heart, and his affectionate expressions towards his mother and sister were scarcely stronger than the warmth with which he congratulated himself upon being once more with his dear old tutor, Dr. Sands. It was beautiful to see the affectionate respect with which he spoke to him; he appeared to look up to him quite as to a father.

Lady Marwood for once seemed to have forgotten herself, in the general delight which the return of her son had caused; and Florence was not a little surprised to observe how devoted she appeared in her attentions to all his wants and wishes, when she recol-

lected that, until the arrival of his letter at Wandesford, announcing his immediate return, she had scarcely ever heard her cousin's name mentioned, and certainly never in terms of very strong affection. Lady Marwood was, however, as fond of her son as she could be of any thing besides herself. She was proud of his beauty and his attainments, though she attached but little value to the high character he bore, and seldom listened when Dr. Sands happened to dwell particularly on his moral worth, and his noble sense of honour and integrity. She thought of him chiefly as the Earl of Marwood, and her devotion to him was quite as much based upon interested motives as upon her feelings of affection.

Lord Marwood had had a long minority, and would now come into possession of a splendid fortune ; while, with her habits, the jointure of Lady Marwood scarcely covered

one half of her yearly expenses. It was, therefore, her policy to do every thing to please her son ; and, as when she had an object to gain, her manner could be very different from the peevish, discontented one in which she constantly indulged ; she fully succeeded in her wish, and the affectionate heart of her son glowed with delight while listening to the words of tenderness she addressed to him, as she detailed all the preparations for his birth-day, with which she had busied herself in the hope of pleasing him.

CHAPTER V.

THE arrival of Mr. De Grey had been an event so little expected by Florence, that she could not for some time recover from the confusion into which it had thrown all her ideas. The night was passed in endeavouring to regain some little degree of composure; but morning came, and Florence found herself once more obliged to join the assembled party without having come to any other decision as to what her conduct towards Gerald must be in future, than a sort of vague intention of shewing him, that nothing that had passed between them ever recurred to her recollection.

This resolution Florence might possibly

have effected, if time had been granted her for the assumption of dignity and reserve; for she was as proud as she was sensitive. But in the hurry of her first meeting with Gerald, all attempt at self-control had been vain. He had returned: and, through the dark gloom which recollection of their last interview, and the deep distress it had caused to her, had cast upon her mind, the sun of happiness broke forth, and the vivifying effect of his rays could not be concealed.

Gerald was not slow to perceive the thrill of joy with which his presence had filled Florence. The timid tear that trembled beneath the beautiful eye-lashes, the burning cheek and heaving bosom of Florence, as he took his accustomed place in the evening by her side, at least did not speak of anger; and there was more of love, and less of gratified vanity, in the looks with which Gerald regarded her, than had ever before

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marked his manner towards her. But the recollection of their last meeting was still present to his mind. He knew too well what had been the cause of her illness, and saw how careful he must be not to alarm or distress a nature at once so passionate and so shrinking in its sensitive delicacy.

Tender and gentle as a mother's accents were the words which poured from Gerald's lips. At first it seemed as if Florence trembled with apprehension that some allusion should be made to a scene which she endeavoured to forget; but Gerald spoke of other things. He spoke to her of home, of her sisters; and her fears were hushed. For the moment she was happy; and, before they separated for the night, she had looked up with more confidence, and smiled upon him—her sweet smile of other days, and once again Gerald had clasped her hand within his own.

Florence had been for some days occupied in taking a view of part of the Castle which looked towards the inner court. In order to do this with more comfort, Lady Julia had arranged one of the lower rooms for her as a painting room, and there the greatest part of the mornings had been passed by the two friends. There, while Florence drew, or, pencil in hand, pondered over the event which had so completely altered all her views of happiness in this world, would Lady Julia patiently remain, filling the ear of her cousin with pernicious counsels, and gradually endeavouring to instil into her mind all those convenient doctrines of independence and unfixed morality, which had been her own guide through life.

Florence listened, and started to find that for a moment she could have harboured such thoughts as sometimes flitted across her mind during these conversations. But the argu-

ments of Lady Julia fell comparatively harmless. In the weakness of her own heart lay the only danger for Florence. She never could have steadily contemplated the commission of any act which her judgment and feeling of duty to her parents condemned. At least, so she thought when such a suggestion came in the form of words from another's lips; and yet had she not already deceived, and did she not still continue to deceive, those to whom her heart acknowledged an implicit submission?

Full of these contradictory thoughts and conclusions, Florence was bending over her drawing, having early escaped from the breakfast-room. But her hand was unsteady, and her eye still more so. The old tower on which she gazed seemed actually to rock before her sight, and she gave up all attempt at the completion of her work, and sat silent and perplexed before it. Some time had

elapsed since she had been there, when the sound of voices roused her from her meditation, and Lady Julia, with her brother and Mr. De Grey, entered the room.

“ I have brought Marwood to see the drawing,” she exclaimed ; and, pressing forward before her brother, Lady Julia seized upon it and placed it in the hands of Mr. De Grey.

Florence drew beautifully — not like the miserable attempts of most young ladies ; but with a fine bold touch that gave every light and shadow true to nature, and left no doubt upon the mind of the beholder with what freedom and ease the drawing had been executed. In landscape she particularly excelled ; and many were the praises with which Lord Marwood greeted this specimen of her skill ; and so earnestly did he entreat that, when finished, she would bestow it upon him, that Florence could not refuse.

As she made this promise, she caught the

eye of Gerald fixed upon her; and, as she fancied, with a look of reproach. Her heart beat violently, and she endeavoured to say something which might release her from the engagement she had just made. But Lord Marwood did not hear the words she addressed to him. Lady Julia had hurried him away: their laughing voices were soon lost in the distance, and Florence trembled as she found herself alone with Gerald, and actually shrunk from his look as he sat before her with eyes beaming with admiration.

“At last,” he exclaimed, “I can see you for one moment alone. Dear—dear Florence, how have I longed for this hour! I have been so wretched since we parted!”

Florence bent her head too low for him to have a view of her face; but the tears which fell fast upon the little hand which rested on the table before her, shewed how deeply his words had affected her.

“ Florence,” he continued, finding she did not answer, “are you not equally happy? Speak to me!—say that our meeting gives joy to you also. You do not know what I have suffered since I saw you.”

“ Alas! your suffering cannot have equalled mine,” said Florence, in a low voice. “ I have been most wretched.”

“ You could not think I had really gone abroad!” exclaimed Gerald; “you knew, or you might have known, that I should stay to watch over you,—to see whether you followed my advice or not. You can never imagine the grief it was to me to think that you might love another.”

“ But you wished it, Gerald ;—you wished me to do so,” said Florence.

“ Yes; I know I said so: but it was but as a matter of duty; it was but the advice I should have given to a sister. It was certainly not prudent to reject such a match as Saville.”

“ I could not love him. Would it not have been more wrong to have deceived him ? ”

This question Gerald did not find quite convenient to answer. He proceeded, therefore, as though it had not been addressed to him,—

“ Florence, you do not know the misery it was to me to speak to you as I did. It was dreadful; but I thought it right to do so. Have you forgiven me for it? You should have respected the motive that urged me to do so, and not have resented it.”

“ I did not resent it, Gerald; indeed, I did not. But why do you speak to me of what was so painful? You promised me never to do so.”

“ I did promise it; but I cannot resist it now, Florence. You must know how much I love you — how long I have loved you, though I had no hope you would think my affection worthy of your notice.”

“ Oh, Gerald !” exclaimed Florence, clasping her hands ; but her tears prevented her saying more.

Touched by her emotion, Gerald seated himself by her side ; and, taking her hand within his own, continued,—

“ I had sometimes hoped, dear Florence, that you were not indifferent to me. I had thought that the intimacy of our acquaintance, the long years we have almost spent together, might give me some little claim upon your affection. But I am so much older than you are ! I am poor—there is nothing for you to love. You would despise the offer of such a heart as mine.”

“ No ; I should never despise you, dear Gerald,” said Florence, though her voice was broken by sobs.

“ Then you love me !” exclaimed he ;
“ you do love me, Florence. Oh ! why will you not say so ?”

Florence pressed the hand which held hers, and, as she half turned her head away, a faint "Yes" met the ear of Gerald. And then poor Florence forgot all her sorrows—all her sufferings. For one short hour she was supremely happy. The rapture of Gerald's thanks—the tenderness of his manner convinced her of his sincerity; and, for a little while, as Gerald's arms supported her, and her head rested on his bosom, she forgot that any other existed in the world besides the one who made a world of joy to her. Any doubt of his affection that might have existed in her mind before, vanished as he dwelt upon the motives of duty and friendship to her family, which had induced him to act as he had done. Fond and credulous, the heart of Florence too readily absolved him from all suspicion; and in so favourable light did he contrive to place his conduct to her eyes, that she forgave the sorrow it

had caused, in the admiration with which so noble a self-sacrifice on his part had filled her.

Long had they sat together,—the deceiver and the deceived; but much remained to be said before Gerald could trust the innocent, unsuspecting girl to leave him. Cautiously, but firmly, did he endeavour to impress upon her the necessity of silence and secrecy. He found the task more difficult than he at first had anticipated. Florence had owned her love for him; had expressed, with all the enthusiasm of a young and ardent mind, her readiness to give up all, and live in comparative poverty with him. But when, instead of some definite proposal, some hint as to when, or how, their marriage might ultimately take place, his first and most anxious care was to extort a promise from her, that none but themselves should know of their engagement—then all her former fears

returned. Then again she felt as if some great mystery hung over herself and Gerald, and deeply did she deplore the line of conduct she had pursued in having concealed her long attachment to him from her mother. It seemed as if she had, by her own act, placed herself without the pale of advice or assistance; and her delicacy revolted at the idea that the only person who shared her confidence was that one to whom it was most difficult to impart all her fears and scruples.

Her refusal to continue their engagement on such terms was so positive, that Gerald had no course left but to temporize. The heart of Florence was his own; and he might safely calculate that, once assured of his affection, her attachment would gradually strengthen until the dictates of reason became powerless. He, therefore, affected to enter into her feelings, and representing, in the

strongest terms, that any hasty communication with her family would be instantly fatal to their happiness, he at length obtained from her a promise of leaving the whole arrangement in his hands, with an understanding that a very few days were to elapse before she was to be at liberty to consult her parents as to their approval of the step she had taken.

CHAPTER VI.

AND Florence sat alone where Gerald had left her. Unsupported by his presence, her heart trembled to think upon what she had done. But the heaviest task remained to be performed. Her daily letter to her mother was still unwritten ; that letter which had hitherto contained a minute account of all that took place, of all her thoughts and feelings, one only subject excepted. And now that the events of the last few hours had wrought so material a change in her position, when she longed to pour out every secret feeling of her heart, and tell how her grief was past, and, happy in the certainty of

Gerald's love, dwell with rapture on the hope of future bliss, now was she forced to maintain even a deeper silence than before.

The last words of Gerald as he left her were a prayer that his arrival at the Castle should not be mentioned ; and how could she disobey him ? for his prayer was a command. So specious had been his reasoning, that her arguments were too weak to oppose to it, and her implicit confidence forbade her to doubt his sincerity.

For many days Florence continued in the same state of conflicting emotion. While Gerald sat beside her, her fears were hushed. His devotion and tenderness, apparently, surpassed even her own, and anxiety and alarm slept as his soft, persuasive accents reached her ear.

The Castle was filled with guests. Lord Marwood, fully occupied in attending to them, had but little leisure to observe the proceedings of Florence ; and thus, day after day,

was she left to the enjoyment of that society so dear and so dangerous to her. Time went by, as in a delicious dream, and each day did Gerald note with joy that the struggling conscience of poor Florence appeared more nearly lulled to rest, though at times she would urge him with the most frantic entreaties to allow her to communicate to her mother the secret of their engagement. Then would he redouble his caresses, his professions of attachment and unchangeable devotion, and the trusting heart of Florence was once more silenced.

And well might Florence be deceived, for the words which at first had flowed from his lips with an ease which, though merely the effect of habit, might, with the unsuspecting, have passed for sincerity, now burst forth in a torrent of eloquence and warmth which completely overpowered the scruples and objections of Florence.

In truth, the feelings of Gerald had undergone a total change. From having formerly regarded Florence with indifference, he now entertained a violent passion for her ; and each day, as he marked her returning colour and the increase of beauty which her happiness had imparted, it only served to heighten the selfish feeling which he continued to dignify with the name of love.

On the day preceding the birth-day of Lord Marwood, Florence, alarmed by the necessity of her immediate return to Wandesford, which had been fixed to take place very soon after the *fête* was over, had, with more decision than she had lately shewn, urged upon Gerald the extreme reluctance she felt that their secret should remain longer unrevealed ; and he, at length, appeared partially to yield to her entreaties, and proposed that she should confide in Lady Julia.

Florence hesitated : a secret voice seemed to

warn her of the counsels of her cousin ; but, as usual, the persuasions of her lover prevailed, and her own objections were overruled. Gerald dwelt so much upon the superior sense and knowledge of the world which he ascribed to Lady Julia, as well as upon the candour and honesty of her opinions, and her affection for Florence, that at length she actually felt ashamed of having had a doubt upon the subject, and hastily leaving Gerald, she flew to Lady Julia's room, impatient to disclose her anxiety and implore her assistance.

“ My dear Florence,” exclaimed her cousin, after she had patiently listened to rather a confused statement of her perplexities, “ do you suppose you have told me what I did not know before ? From the moment Gerald arrived with my brother, you have been an altered being ; I cannot say the delight it has been to me to see your happiness.”

“ Thank you, dearest,” said Florence, as

she threw her arms round her cousin's neck, — “thank you a thousand times for all your kindness to me; but I am not quite happy,—not until this is all settled. I cannot bear the thought of concealing it from mamma.”

“What nonsense!” exclaimed Lady Julia; “you are all really so full of odd prejudices. I wonder you did not say there was ‘impropriety’ in it. It is the family word, you know,” added she, laughing.

“Well, but I do not think — that is, I am afraid — that it is not quite proper,” said Florence, with a burning blush.

“Really, Florence, you will never leave off your childish ways! Now you are engaged to be married, you might shew a little more sense, I think!”

“Oh, Julia! I cannot think it right. Much as I love Gerald, I cannot forget mamma and my own dear home: and why should I not tell them what has made me so happy?”

“Simply because they will not like to be

disappointed in their ambitious projects. They want you to make a great marriage, and you know Gerald is very poor!"

"I know it; he has told me so, and I am ready to give up the world and every thing for him. I would work for him—even beg for him, if he wished it! There is nothing I would not do, without a murmur, and still think myself too happy to be loved by him! But this secrecy is so very wrong, I cannot bear it. I am sure when my father and mother know what I feel, they will not refuse their consent to my marrying Gerald. They are so kind, so affectionate to me, it breaks my heart to deceive them in this manner. I have not told them even that he is here."

"You would have been a great fool if you had!" said Lady Julia.

"Why do you say so, Julia? Why should I be obliged to conceal it? Surely there must be some other reason besides his poverty?"

Oh! tell me if there is,—tell me, dear Julia, if you know of any other obstacle!”

“No, of course not. What other objection could any one make to Gerald De Grey? Is he not handsome, well-born, amiable, and full of talent? I should think that not only he would be a good match for you, but that he might aspire to the very best alliance in every way, were it not for the smallness of his fortune. But that would be instantly objected to by your father, who despises every one that is not as rich as himself.”

“He does not despise Gerald! I am sure he does not; though sometimes it appears to me that Gerald fancies my father has some prejudice against him. Oh! if he would but allow me to confide in my dear mother!” exclaimed Florence.

“He is perfectly right not to allow it: he understands the particular prejudices of the family much better than you appear to do,

Florence. He does not want to lose you for ever by such an indiscretion, when a little time may remove all difficulty."

"I would wait—I would do any thing, bear any thing, if once they knew the real feelings of my heart; but to go on deceiving them, allowing them, perhaps, to indulge in other hopes, and yet to know myself irrevocably engaged, is too dreadful! I could not bear their looks of love, their kindness would distract me. It often has done so when I believed Gerald to be indifferent, and yet knew my own affection for him; now it would be doubly hard to bear. Oh, Julia!" continued Florence, bursting into tears, "advise me—direct me; you who are so clever, tell me what I must do, for my heart is so torn, so divided, I cannot judge for myself."

"I have but one opinion upon the subject," replied Lady Julia, coldly; "I should look upon your betrayal of Gerald's secret against

his will as a most base and treacherous act, and one that would fully justify him in renouncing you for ever, which I do not doubt would be instantly the case."

Florence started, and fixed an anxious look upon her cousin's face. The idea of Gerald's desertion appeared to strike terror into her heart. Lady Julia saw her advantage, and proceeded in the same tone, though with more decision in her manner,—

. "There is but one course for you to take. Decide for yourself, unless you wish to be the victim of your family. Marry Gerald first, and then your fate is secure. As soon as they find that it is beyond recal, they will be glad enough to forgive it."

"Never—never!" exclaimed Florence, vehemently, "I would rather die a thousand times! I would rather that my heart should break, as it surely would do were I to be for ever separated from Gerald, than com-

mit such a dreadful sin. It would kill my poor mother, such ingratitude — such disobedience from her child ! Oh, no !” continued Florence, sobbing violently, “ do not talk to me of such a thing, you have not such a mother as I have, such a good, kind father ; you cannot know how I love them !”

“ My dear Florence, how you agitate yourself for nothing,” said Lady Julia, taking her hand, “ there is no harm done ; I merely recommended what any sensible person must do, — what I should do myself ; but if you do not like to follow my advice, you are not obliged to do so. Still, I do think it would be rather a better plan than wearing away your life in a useless engagement, and much more fair towards Gerald. But it seems to me that you think more of your own feelings and fancies than of his affection, or the unhappy position in which for your sake he is placed.”

“ Oh, do not say so, Julia ! his happiness is dearer to me than my own.”

“ And yet you hesitate to do the only thing you can do to secure it. Besides, there is another reason for Gerald’s wishing to preserve silence for the present towards your father. From motives of delicacy he dares not make his proposal in form, while he has nothing on his part to offer. Your fortune must be large ; you have no brother, and Gerald’s notions of honour, and his feelings on that subject, are so very nice, that his pride deters him from appearing to wish to make an advantageous marriage. At his father’s death he must have Cleveden Abbey, and a very good fortune, but old Mr. De Grey may live these twenty years.”

“ Are you sure,” said Florence, “ that I shall be so rich ? are you quite sure of it ? ”

“ Certain,” replied Lady Julia ; “ if I was not, I never should have advised any thing

that might injure Gerald so materially as your marrying him without money, for I am very fond of him, though you appear to have his interest at heart but very little. Oh! if I had but a large fortune, what happiness I should find in bestowing it upon a man that I loved! No worldly consideration, no foolish fears of my family's displeasure, should interfere for a moment to check the enthusiasm with which I should lay it at his feet, the delight with which I should make any sacrifice to shew my devotion to him I loved — and for such a man as Gerald!”

And Lady Julia raised her eyes to heaven, and clasped her hands, as if in rapture at the image her thoughts had conjured up.

Florence remained silent, but a change appeared to come over her countenance, and for some time she was wrapped in deep thought. The words of the tempter had sunk deep into her soul. In vain might Lady Julia have

counselled disobedience, in vain attempted to shake the confidence of Florence in the affection or disinterestedness of her parents, had she not backed up her insidious arguments by this indirect appeal to the noble and generous nature of Florence. For the first time she allowed her mind to dwell upon the possibility of acting in opposition to the wishes of her parents. The hint of her cousin as to her fortune seemed to change the whole position of the affair. Until that moment she did not know that she was to be rich; she had never bestowed a thought upon the subject; and now her heart bounded at the idea that in her power lay the means of bestowing wealth upon him she loved.

The delicacy with which Gerald had ever abstained from attending to the subject filled Florence with admiration, and, for the first few moments, she almost fancied that the circumstances in which she was placed might

justify such a step as her cousin had advised ; but as she grew more calm, her heart revolted from the idea. The love of home, the affections of the child, were still too strong within her bosom, and, turning suddenly to Lady Julia, she exclaimed,—

“ Dear Julia, do not talk to me of this again. I have trusted you with my secret ; I have owned to you the deep affection that I feel for Gerald. It cannot change. Nothing can ever alter my feelings towards him ; but I cannot consent to do what I should repent of during my whole life. It would not be for his happiness either ; for if he loves me, as he says he does, he could not bear to look upon the sorrow that would be mine were I to disobey my parents. I will wait patiently,—wait for years, if it may be so, and without a murmur.”

“ And you think,” said Lady Julia, rising as if to leave the room, “ that *he* will be equally satisfied to wait your good pleasure

until your prejudices are dispelled? No: depend upon it, if you tamper with his patience in such an unjustifiable manner, you will very soon hear no more of Gerald De Grey. He knows his own value a little too well to waste his life in such a useless manner when hundreds of women are coveting even a look from him."

"He will only value me the more from seeing that it is from a motive of duty," said Florence, with spirit, "and his good opinion is as dear to me as is his love."

"My dear Florence, you are only fit for a heroine in a novel. When you can talk with common sense upon the subject, we will return to it. Forgive me, now, for leaving you, but I promised mamma to go and help her about the decorations of the ball-room. Good-by, foolish child!"

So saying, Lady Julia playfully kissed her cousin's cheek, and left the room.

But the cause of her haste was not, as she had said, to seek Lady Marwood. At that moment her head was filled with far other thoughts than those by which her mother was occupied, and she resolved no longer to delay the preparations necessary to the accomplishment of a plan which had for some days been uppermost in her mind.

On leaving Florence, Lady Julia hurried to her brother's apartments, and having ascertained that the adjoining rooms were vacant she entered one which was fitted up as a library. At one end of it stood a very large cabinet of finely-carved oak, towards which Lady Julia immediately advanced; and, having opened several drawers apparently without succeeding in the object of her search, at length drew forth some rusty keys, and, carefully examining them, selected two, and closed the cabinet.

In a few moments Lady Julia had crossed

the inner court, and stood at the opposite side of the quadrangle from that which was inhabited by the family. A long gallery terminated at a door to which she applied one of the keys which she had brought. It opened, and she immediately prepared to descend.

A steep spiral staircase led to the tower below, and groping her way through the many dark turnings of the lower gallery, she came at last to a low iron door in one of the turrets. Scarcely a glimmering of light came from the small loop-holes above, and the cold, sepulchral feel of the place made her shudder. She listened attentively, but no sound reached her ear from the Castle. For a moment she trembled at the loneliness and dismal look of the place where she stood, and a sensation of horror seized upon her as she recollected that she had omitted to bring away the key from the upper door: what if any one should happen to pass, and perceive that it was open? So unusual a

circumstance might attract attention, and a shriek almost broke from her lips as she contemplated the possibility of being immured in such a spot.

Trembling and faint from the sudden fear which had assailed her, she could scarcely summon sufficient strength to retrace her steps, and slowly she remounted the steep turret stairs; but at length the increasing light told her that she was safe, and hastily possessing herself of the key of the door, she closed it gently, and once more descended in safety to the bottom of the stairs.

With some difficulty she at length discovered the lock of the iron door; and, drawing a key from her pocket, she applied it, but to turn it seemed impossible, and for some time it resisted her utmost strength. The rust of years was upon it; and Lady Julia, in despair, was upon the point of giving up the attempt, when at last it yielded to her efforts, and with a

harsh and sullen sound the heavy lock gave way, and the door creaked upon its hinges.

The door opened inside, and no sooner had Lady Julia forced it back sufficiently to admit of her passing, than a fresh difficulty arose. A close iron grating was still between her and the narrow path which was scarcely discernible through the tangled branches and clinging ivy with which it was almost overgrown. No bolt was visible, the grating seemed fixed into the wall on either side; and in her vexation Lady Julia struck violently upon the bars with her foot. As she did so the whole of the iron-work appeared to shake; and, at length, by repeated efforts she ascertained that the bars did not reach the stone, but formed a complete door, so closely fitted to the low arch that she had at first been deceived by its appearance. With some labour she contrived to move it upon its hinges; and, tearing away the creepers with which it was covered, soon

effected a passage sufficiently wide to allow of her reaching the path.

Once more she breathed the free air of heaven. She looked upwards towards the Castle, but the projection of the tower prevented the spot upon which she stood being visible from any window of that part which was usually inhabited. With breathless attention she listened, but so lonely was the angle that no sound could reach it from within, and the shrill cry of the bittern from the lake was all that she heard.

With a timid step she advanced along the narrow path, which was more in the form of rugged stairs than a level walk, till the sudden plashing of something in the moat below startled her, and she clung to the ivied wall in fear and trembling. It was only a stone which her foot had displaced, but her guilty conscience made every thing appear suspicious.

A few moments more and she had reached the end of her somewhat perilous journey, and

a low door, similar to the one she had passed with so much difficulty, appeared, but still more sunk into the massive wall. This, however, did not seem to have been so long in disuse, for it opened easily inwards, and Lady Julia crept slowly beneath its arch.

For a few moments she disappeared, but, on her return, her face was radiant with joy. Whatever had been her purpose she had evidently accomplished it; and, returning to the turret stairs, she carefully increased the aperture she had made, and twining the ivy lightly over the grating, so as not to attract attention, should any one happen to look upon it from the other side of the moat, she closed the doors, and, exhausted with the fatigue she had undergone, hastily remounted the stairs, and, hurrying to her own room, poured some drops of laudanum into a glass, threw herself upon her sofa, and endeavoured to regain some degree of composure.

CHAPTER VII.

“LET us speak no more upon the subject, dearest,” said Mr. De Grey, as he drew the arm of Florence within his own; “your wish shall be a law to me.”

“Thank you, dear Gerald!” replied Florence, turning to him with a sweet smile, that played across her agitated countenance like a sunbeam struggling through the clouds.

“I had hoped,” continued Gerald, “that your love for me was deeper—that you would not have so calmly weighed all worldly considerations, and antiquated notions of slavery to your family, against the devotion and intense strength of my affection for you. But

I was deceived. Dear Florence, forgive me. I did but measure your love by my own, and if I have found it less deep than I had fondly calculated on, I must blame myself alone. I have wearied you by the excess of my affection. I will be more patient. I will bear, as I can, the misery of a breaking heart, for my heart will break, Florence, if you reject me!"

The smile had vanished from the lips of Florence, and the brightness of her large hazel eyes was quenched in tears as she raised them slowly, with an expression of helplessness, to Gerald's face. The emotion he had betrayed in speaking—the trembling of that rich, deep voice had sunk into her heart; and when he reproached her for want of love, the cruel injustice of his words was torture. She could not trust herself to enter again upon a subject which, since the day before, had been incessantly debated between them, she could not combat the arguments of

Gerald. She trembled at the weakness of her own heart, and even the strong motives of duty which upheld her in her resolution at times lost somewhat of their firmness when opposed to the passionate entreaties of her lover, and the gushing tenderness of her own nature. The trial was too great for her strength, and, bewildered by contending feelings, she sought a temporary refuge from her distress, in an earnest entreaty that the subject of a clandestine marriage should no more be mentioned between them.

Gerald at length affected to consent, and as he met the imploring look which she now turned upon him, he tenderly pressed her to his heart, and, kissing the tears from her eyes, renewed his promise of not again distressing her by a recurrence to the forbidden topic of conversation. He carelessly adverted to other things, and as they pursued their walk, they came in sight of the merry groups now gathering upon the lawn; for it was Lord

Marwood's birth-day, and every one in the country, from far and near, had assembled to do honour to the event which had brought the young Earl to take possession of his home. Beneath the wide-spreading trees in front of the Castle were ranged long tables which groaned beneath the weight of the good cheer provided for the feast. All the old games of former days were revived, and on all sides mirth and joy resounded.

Florence, who had never seen any thing of the kind, was delighted, and her buoyant spirits rose again to their usual height as Gerald led her through the assembled throng, and pointed out every thing which he thought could amuse her, and divert her thoughts from her own sorrow.

Gerald, too, appeared to have forgotten his depression, and laughed and talked with the foremost of the gay groups which surrounded them, and many a blessing was bestowed by

the old and grey-headed on the sweet face of Florence—the young Lord's cousin; while more than one sly glance of admiration might have been detected from the laughing blue eyes of some blooming country girl, as she caught the look of the handsome stranger fixed upon her.

All around was gladness. The clansman's sturdy, honest look, in his picturesque dress, and his wife and daughters, with each a knot of blue riband (the Marwood colour), coquetishly placed wherever her fancy had deemed most becoming, were a glorious sample of the fine and attached Scottish peasantry; and the heart of Florence glowed with delight as she gazed upon their happy faces, and heard the grateful expressions of affection with which they spoke of the young Earl and his family.

Gerald watched with pleasure the returning spirits of his companion; and for some time they continued to linger in the crowd,

and the gay laugh of Florence more than once reached his ear, as she watched the gambols of a joyous little party of boys assembled near the spot where she stood.

The happiness of those around seemed to reach the heart of Florence; and as she leaned on Gerald's arm, and looked up into his face, while one bright smile lingered but to give place to the next, Gerald felt every moment his passionate admiration of her beauty increase. Cold must have been the being that could gaze unmoved upon the angelic face of Florence Brandon; but black must have been the heart that could look upon the sunshine of her face, and the trusting fondness that breathed in every look and word, and yet devise evil against the beauteous being whose innocence should have claimed protection and respect.

But the day was advancing, the merry voices grew less loud, and the gay groups

drew together, and slowly made their way to the spot where their feast was to be held. The children, all ranged at one side of the lawn, took the places assigned to them; and Florence, with her cousin and the other ladies, gladly ministered to their little wants, and continued talking and laughing with them, until the fast gathering shades of evening began to warn the happy crowd that their day of enjoyment drew near to its close.

And now the fine old hall of the Castle seemed once more to tell of the state of former days. The banquet was spread, and the guests were placed. The whole of the chief table on the dais was filled by those who were staying at the Castle; while others, who had only been invited to the dinner and the ball, occupied the tables at the nearest end of the hall; and the remainder of the space at the lower end was completely filled by the principal attendants of the Earl.

Many a fair face smiled upon the gay and handsome Lord Marwood as, after his health had been drunk, he rose, and, with grace and dignity happily blended, thanked the surrounding company, while the affectionate manner in which he alluded to his father's early death brought tears into the eyes of all that listened to his words ; and even the callous and worldly-minded Lady Marwood, who sat blazing in her diamonds and her rouge, puffed up with the inordinate vanity which her present position inspired, felt her heart swell with fondness for the spirited and high-minded young man, upon whose countenance she read all that the pride of ancestry and noble feelings of an honest heart could inspire.

When Lord Marwood ceased speaking, a loud cheer burst from the crowd, and again and again it rang through the hall, till the very roof re-echoed to its sound ; and the

young Lord stood and bowed and smiled upon the happy faces round him, and with his flushed cheek and beaming eye shewed how much he felt the kindness of their welcome ; then reseating himself, upon a sign from him the musicians in the gallery poured forth their strains while the cup went round, and the hearth was replenished with an ample supply of blazing logs.

It was a bright and glorious scene. The rude splendour of ancient times was happily mingled with the comfort and refinement of modern luxury. The richest carpets were laid beneath the tables, and the heavy oaken forms were carefully covered with crimson cloth ; but the centre of the hall remained open, and the old pavement, with its time-worn look, told of years long gone by ; and as the eye glanced above, and saw the cumbrous armour on the walls, and the banners proudly floating overhead, fancy flew back to the days

of chivalry, and knight and squire in bright array seemed wanting in that hall, where the rich liveries of the attendants, and their noiseless step, might have been more appropriately exchanged for the heavy tramp of mail-clad followers.

But if less picturesque, the present scene was at least more peaceful, and in no days could mirth and glee be more genuine than at that moment.

Loveliest among the many bright forms which graced the dais sat Florence Brandon. She was dressed in white, and the only ornament she wore was a rose which Gerald had given her. Her face beamed with happiness. All care seemed for the moment to be forgotten, both by her and the object of her anxiety who sat beside her. Gerald had kept his promise, and had ceased to urge the point which had so much distressed her; and with the removal of immediate anxiety, the

young heart of Florence seemed to have shaken off its load of sorrow, and her trusting nature already began to hope and believe that her entreaties were on the point of being heard, and that a short time would set her free from the difficulties with which she was beset.

Unsuspecting and unskilled in concealment, the countenance of Florence betrayed too much what was passing within ; and on that evening, for the first time, was her secret suspected, and by one who might have saved her. Alas ! the discovery came too late ; and never again did the lovely face and form of Florence Brandon meet the anxious eye which was turned upon her as she rose to leave the hall, and with her hand clasped in that of Gerald, smiled sweetly as his whispered request that she would dance with him, met her ear.

CHAPTER VIII.

FLORENCE had never been at a ball before. At first, when she stood up to dance, she felt confused and timid, the crowd was so new to her. But Gerald was her partner; and as he rallied her upon her shyness, and praised her dancing, she began to feel less nervous, and in a short time entered into the spirit of the scene.

Florence's heart fell as Gerald told her they must not dance together again, and a look of sorrow overspread her face as he resigned her to another partner; but his slightest wish was a law to her, and she recovered

her spirits as she perceived that he continued to occupy an antique-looking sofa close by where he had seated himself with Lady Julia, apparently in deep conversation, but Florence fondly hoped merely for the purpose of watching her as she danced.

One admiring partner succeeded to another, and Florence at length became weary of the attentions she received, though she continued to accept them, and to go through the forms of the dance. But her step suddenly grew languid, for very soon she perceived that Gerald was nowhere to be seen. The sofa was unoccupied — Lady Julia, too, had vanished — and Florence had no means of ascertaining the reason of his having abruptly quitted the ball-room. All the interest of the scene had passed away, and Florence looked with disgust on the smiling faces around her, and listened to the joyous laugh and passing jest, with a sensation of wonder that people

should find so much amusement in a ball-room.

Supper was announced, and she suffered herself to be led into the room. As they passed the ante-room, she looked anxiously around, but the form she sought was nowhere to be seen. Her joy was all over, and the lassitude which every movement bespoke, arose more from mental than bodily depression.

As they went into supper, she met Lord Marwood, who hastily claimed her hand for the first dance afterwards ; and Florence felt that, with all her disinclination to dance, she could not possibly refuse her cousin.

As they stood up in their places, every eye was turned towards them ; and many were the prophecies that night that the beautiful Florence would be one day Countess of Marwood. Perhaps the two who were the most nearly concerned were almost the only ones in the room to whom some thought of the

kind did not suggest itself; but Florence and her cousin thought not of each other; and as Lord Marwood gaily complimented her upon her looks and the universal admiration she had excited, it was more in the playful style of a brother anxious for her success, than the timid praise of one who felt the dawning of love in his bosom.

Florence looked beautiful again, and danced once more with her wonted animation, for her quick eye had detected the reappearance of Gerald; and the moment she could contrive to disengage herself from her cousin, she took refuge by Lady Julia's side, where she was almost immediately joined by Mr. De Grey.

"You have danced yourself nearly to death!" exclaimed Lady Julia. "How can you tire yourself in such a manner?"

"I don't know. I had nothing else to do. I am not at all tired, however," replied

Florence, as Gerald looked anxiously at her.

“Well, I must go and see what mamma is about,” exclaimed Lady Julia, rising from her seat. “How full the room is still—I shall be an hour before I find her!”

“Florence,” said Gerald, as soon as she was gone, “do not dance any more. Come and walk with me.”

“I will not dance again, certainly, if I can be with you. But where have you hid yourself all the evening, Gerald? I could not conceive what had become of you.”

“Did any one inquire for me?” answered Gerald, evasively. “Did any one remark my absence?”

“Oh, no!—at least, I believe not. But I *felt* in a moment that you were gone.”

Gerald made no reply to these words but by fondly pressing the hand which rested on his arm. He had led her from the ball-

room, and carefully wrapping a warm shawl round her, they walked out upon the terrace.

“What a delicious moonlight!” said Florence, as she gazed upwards at the transparent sky. The beauty of the Castle arrested her attention; and she almost forgot for a moment to think of Gerald, as she gazed with delight on the noble towers standing out in bold relief against the heavens; while, as she advanced towards the end of the terrace, the greater part of the building was visible to her eye.

The contrast of the mirth within and the stillness without was striking. The gay sound of the music came from the opened windows, the beautiful old tracery of which was distinctly visible from the strong light of the ball-room; while at the other side of the court, the heavy battlements and turrets, with their narrow loop-holes, were, at

one moment, buried in deep shadow, at another, stood out clear as at noonday beneath the soft and silvery light of the moon which fell upon them. Calm and venerable in its repose, the ancient building seemed to sleep on undisturbed, as though it heeded not the ravages of time, still less the joyousness of the spirits which revelled within its walls.

Florence gazed thoughtfully upon the beauty of the scene, and then turned to look upon the deep waters of the moat and the majestic woods of the far-spreading park beyond. But Gerald spoke not. Twice had Florence called upon him to participate in her delight, but he did not seem to hear the words she addressed to him ; and on looking up into his face, she was startled to behold the deep expression of sorrow which seemed to have taken the place of his late happy look.

“Florence!” he at length exclaimed, and the sound of his voice made her shudder; “you said just now you had missed me from the ball-room—that you *felt* I had left it. Did the thought pain you when you fancied I was gone?”

“Can you ask me such a question? Can you think I could lose a moment of your society, and not grieve for it?”

“Then you would miss me very much? You would be unhappy without me?” continued he, tenderly.

“Oh, most wretched!” said Florence, as she bowed her head upon her hands. “Do not talk of such a thing. You do not doubt what I should feel, dear—dear Gerald!—do you?”

“Alas! no. I wish I could do so.”

“You wish you could do so! What can you mean, Gerald? You do not wish me not to love you?” exclaimed Florence, as

she lifted her eyes to his with a happy, confiding smile.

“Oh, no! Could I wish to give up all that makes life precious to me? Could I bear to give up the love of such a beautiful angel as you are?” said Gerald, passionately. “But your very love is a misfortune to me—to yourself. I think I could bear my own sorrow—that is, I could struggle against it if I was the only sufferer: but I cannot bear to think that you are unhappy, Florence, and you will be unhappy when I am gone.”

“Gone!” exclaimed Florence. “You are not going away? Oh! you will not go before I do? You said you would stay here till after I went to Wandesford. Why do you talk of going, dear Gerald?”

“Because I cannot stay—because I am wretched!” said Gerald, passionately. “I cannot stay near you, Florence—I cannot,

day after day, endure your coldness and the torture it inflicts upon me."

"What can you mean?" said Florence, looking up with a half-terrified expression.

"I mean, Florence, that what you call love is unworthy of the name. A cold, calculating, measured feeling, that a heart like mine cannot comprehend—a feeling based upon the opinions of others, dependent upon their will, and ready to vanish at thought of their displeasure!"

"Oh, Gerald!" said Florence, as the tears started from her eyes, "do not say such words. They break my heart. It is cruel—most cruel—for you know how devotedly I love you."

"I know," continued Gerald, in the same bitter tone, "that you say so; but I also know how a woman can act if she *really* loves. Think you that a man's love is to be compared to the shallow, weak, shifting fancy

of a young lady, a fleeting preference, ready to be blown away by the first breath of others—of the hard, the unimpassioned, the worldly-minded, whose own hearts, grown cold and callous, cannot judge of the feelings of the young? What can they know of love? What can they tell of its depth, its fervour, or the misery of desolation that follows the death of our fond hopes? The rapture of meeting, and the anguish of parting, are alike unknown to them. And yet to counsellors like these you would sacrifice my love—you have already sacrificed my happiness!”

The sadness of tone in which the last words had been uttered seemed to freeze the heart of Florence.

“Gerald!” she exclaimed, “you are unjust. Why do you speak to me in this manner? You cannot doubt my affection. Have I not already given you proof of it by concealing

our engagement in the manner I have done? You promised to be more patient."

"I may have done so—but it is impossible. I cannot bear it! Florence, I must leave you; and this hour—this very moment—and for ever! Do not look at me so, Florence—do not cling to me. My mind is made up. This hour we part,—and for ever!"

"No—no!" said Florence, convulsively, as she tried to wind her arms round him. "Oh, do not leave me!"

"I must leave you, Florence. I have sought you but to say farewell for ever! I will never return to England till you are married."

"Oh, my God!" cried Florence, distractedly, "what will become of me?"

"You will forget me," said Gerald, in a stifled voice.

"Forget you—cruel! Have I forgotten you? Even when I did not know how you

loved me, did I forget you? In misery—in illness—till reason deserted me—I had but one thought, and that was of you!”

“Florence, I believe you do love me, but not as I want to be loved. Your feelings are cold compared to mine.”

“What shall I say to tell you how unjust this accusation is? What can I do to please you?” said Florence, despairingly, as she leaned her head on the breast of Gerald.

“I would have you love as I do, with a love that knows no bounds—that asks no support but from its own strength—that rests upon its own purity, and glories in its devotion!” exclaimed Gerald wildly, as he pressed the trembling form of Florence still closer to his heart.

Too much overcome for resistance, Florence actually gasped for breath; and all power of utterance was lost from the heavy sighs that burst from her bosom.

“Florence,” said Gerald, imploringly, “why will you send me from you? It is you who drive me away—it is your own act. Why will you refuse my prayer? An hour hence, and it will be too late. Consent to be mine. Even now a priest waits in the chapel. Our hands once joined, all will be forgotten. Tomorrow we will kneel together at your father’s feet.”

“Never!—oh, never! Gerald. I would rather die than deceive him in so dreadful a manner. Oh! do not ask me,” cried Florence, as she covered her face with her hands.

“You will not trust me, and yet, but now, you said I was dear to you.”

“It is not that. I know—I am sure you would be all kindness to me, Gerald; but I must not deceive my father—it would be so great a sin,” said Florence, with a shudder which convulsed her whole frame.

“ Florence,” said Gerald, in a voice softer than music, as he raised her shrinking form, and put back the ringlets from her brow ; “ I honour you for such conduct ; but you know not what you do. I am here with you now, to soothe you in your sorrow, to smile when you rejoice, or to kiss away your tears. Where shall I be to-morrow ? Far — far away, and beyond recall. When you rise in the morning, your first thought will be of me, but we shall not meet as usual in the forest walk. You will come there, but no step will greet your ear—you will call upon me, but no voice will answer to yours ; and, in solitude and wretchedness, you will return to the Castle to look upon others’ gladness, and feed upon your own misery. None can comfort you, for you will have brought this sorrow on yourself, and the upbraidings of your own heart will defy all words of pity from others’ lips. And I ! What will

be my feelings? Florence! I dare not think upon the sufferings that will be mine when I have lost you—lost all that made the thoughts of life precious to me. Without a home—without a friend—I must wander through the world, desolate and forlorn. Deprived of hope, a man grows reckless; and you will have driven me from you to seek, in the excitement of the gaming-table or the haunts of vice, a moment's forgetfulness of your unheard-of cruelty—of the cold-blooded, premeditated cruelty, that consigned a love like mine to the darkness of eternal despair!”

“For mercy's sake, Gerald, spare me such words!” cried Florence, sinking on her knees. “I cannot bear this. My heart is breaking,” sobbed the poor girl.

“And mine! Have you no pity for me? Oh, Florence!” continued Gerald, as he raised her in his arms, “have pity on me—have pity on yourself! What will ever

compensate to you for causing such misery to us both? Reflect upon the wickedness it is to break the heart that loves you to distraction. Is there any one, think you, that can love you as I do?"

"Gerald, you will kill me! I must not listen to you."

"Then, farewell for ever!" cried Gerald, straining her to his breast. "The carriage waits that is to bear me hence. Return to the ball-room and smile upon the gay ones there, as you tell them to what a fate you have consigned one who would have died for you. Ay—smile upon the rich and great, while the poor, despised Gerald is hurrying away to hide his misery from all—to die in a foreign land. Farewell, Florence!—Farewell for ever, and may Heaven bless you!"

"Oh, do not go!" cried Florence, in a voice of agony; "do not leave me, Gerald!"

“ I must — I cannot stay,” said Gerald, struggling to disengage himself from her grasp ; but Florence clung to him with the wildness of despair, as she repeated her frantic entreaties that he would not leave her, till, bewildered by her grief, her words grew incoherent.

“ Consent to the marriage, and I will never leave you, Florence. Oh ! can you refuse ? Say but one word — in a moment it will be too late.”

“ I do ! — I do ! — any thing ! — only do not leave me ! ” shrieked the unhappy Florence, as, exhausted by the dreadful agitation she had undergone, she sunk almost senseless upon the breast of Gerald.

“ No, dearest, I will not leave you. Compose yourself for one moment. Do not be alarmed. Lady Julia will come with us to the chapel. My own Florence ! how can I thank you enough ! Calm yourself, dear-

est," he continued, as he supported the steps of the poor, trembling girl towards the end of the terrace.

The fresh air from the park seemed to revive her a little; and soothed by the happiness of Gerald's words and manner, in a few minutes she was enabled to support herself so as to reach the Castle, which they did by a door at some distance from that by which they had left it. On entering the passage, they were met by Lady Julia, and a few hurried words passed between her and Gerald. Poor Florence did not dare to raise her eyes to her cousin's face, till Lady Julia, taking her hand, congratulated her on having at last come to what she called "a sensible decision." The gay tone and decided manner in which these words were uttered, seemed for a moment to re-assure the trembling girl, whose disordered senses greedily clung to the hope of pardon which Lady Julia

so confidently held out. She listened to her flattering words as they hurriedly passed to the gallery at the opposite side of the Castle from that at which they had entered, and along which Lady Julia led her with such haste that she did not observe the total gloom in which they would have been wrapped but for the small lamp which her cousin carried, shading it carefully with a cloak she had thrown around her, so that their presence might not be discernible to those in the court below. It was filled with persons hurrying to and fro, as the bustle of the departing guests had now begun.

The passage they followed was deserted, and soon they had reached the top of the turret stairs, down which Lady Julia motioned them to advance, while she carefully secured the door through which they had just passed. Florence shuddered as she looked down the steep descent, but Gerald, whispering words

of love and comfort, urged her forward, though ever and anon, as the light of the flickering lamp grew dim, she turned an anxious glance upon her cousin, as if in her presence she found comfort and protection. She did not dare to speak. At each effort she had made to appeal to the generous sympathy of her lover, she had been met by Lady Julia with a torrent of sharp reproach; and the bleeding heart of the poor girl could not bear being taxed with want of love for him to whom she was upon the point of sacrificing herself. In maiden bashfulness, she shrunk from the approaching ceremony, and yet, with the yearning fondness of woman's heart, she could not tear herself from him she so truly loved.

They had reached the first door. Florence, not knowing where she was, fancied that it opened at once into the chapel, and, terrified, clung so closely to Lady Julia at the moment

that, as with one hand her cousin was forcing back the ivy from the outside grating through which she had already passed, the sudden weight of Florence caused her to let go the lamp she held in the other, and in an instant the crash of breaking glass was heard upon the stones, and the whole party found themselves in total darkness.

Florence started at the muttered imprecation that reached her ear from the lip of Gerald; but Lady Julia seizing his hand, led him safely along the rugged path, until the low door opened at her touch, and a faint light from within shewed the cushioned steps of the altar before which the vow of Florence was to be registered.

There, in his holy garments, stood the expectant priest. The flowing robe and opened book had scarcely caught her eye, when Florence suddenly started back, and turning her head, beheld Lady Julia in the

act of making a sign of hasty adieu to Gerald.

“Julia! Julia! do not leave me! Oh! for Heaven’s sake stay with me!” she exclaimed.

But Julia would not return. Already the reluctant steps of the poor girl had been hurried within the chapel; and as the heavy door turned upon its hinges, and Lady Julia hastily regained the turret stairs, a cry of such agony reached her ear, that, as with the speed of light she flew along the gallery, she dared not to look back. That cry still followed her, as though an avenging fiend was on her track; and as she entered the lighted rooms, and stood in all the glare and glitter of the still unfaded revelry, the helpless, piteous tone of the bitter cry of that betrayed one rung in her ears, and banished the blood from her heart.

The cruelty of desertion at such a moment had nearly overpowered the shattered nerves

of the unhappy girl ; but Gerald was by her side—it was his hand that stilled the beatings of her heart—it was his lips that poured forth words of endearing love—it was his voice that called her by the endearing name of “ Wife ; ” and Florence, in a delirium of trembling tenderness, which even the anxieties of fear — the forebodings of sorrow could not subdue, hastily pronounced the vows which linked her fate for ever to that of the beloved being by whose side she knelt.

CHAPTER IX.

THE feast is over, and the guests are gone! But one hour has passed, and the lighted hall is dim; the gay garlands have drooped, and their faded freshness will not return, though the soft breath of the early morn steals over them as if to bid them gather strength and smile once more upon the coming day.

The summer night is waning, and the moon has paled; but the bright star of morning still sparkles in the heavens, the stately deer still slumber in the shadowy glades, and the sweet carol of the lark, as in its upward soaring it seems anxiously to pour its hymn of joy into the ear of Heaven, and warble forth its happy

thanks for the blessing of light and life, has not yet broken upon the stillness of night's departing shadow. It is the calm and peaceful hour when the oppression of darkness is no more, when the soft glimmer of the east, and the utter stillness of all around, tell us that we stand upon the threshold of a new day; that we are about to meet again with the busy world, again to enter upon its cares, to taste of its pleasures, or to share in its grief. It is an hour that brings to the thoughtful a still deeper shade of thought. It is an hour of reflection and of stern communion with ourselves. The face of nature is serious, and is still; the sunbeam does not gladden, nor the darkness appal. Uncheered by companionship, unsupported by the false comfortings of human wisdom, how keenly do we feel at such a moment that the world is as nothing, and we stand in it alone—with our conscience and with God!

Thrice happy are they who can enter upon an hour like this; and, looking calmly back upon their past life, lift up their hearts to heaven, and feel that they know no fear!

It was at this hour that, trembling and cowering, as the coming light grew less faint in the horizon, the guilty and terror-struck Lady Julia at length summoned courage to leave her room. In the excitement of the moment, in the anxiety for the success of her diabolical scheme of revenge and hatred, she had overrated her courage; but now that all was over, that her victim was ensnared beyond the possibility of escape, the fear of detection became too strong for her, and she felt that the consequences attendant upon the discovery of her participation in the flight of her cousin, might so seriously affect her own welfare, that, for the first time, she actually trembled at the thoughts of the displeasure of her mother and family.

Hitherto Lady Julia had played her part well. She had remained in the ball-room until the last guest had departed, and was fully satisfied that, at that late hour, the absence of Florence had not been remarked. But an important duty still remained to be performed. It was necessary to efface even to the smallest trace of the manner in which their entrance to the chapel had been gained ; for the passage by which she had conducted them had been so long in disuse that it was very improbable that it could have been discovered by two people who were strangers to the spot. It had been arranged between her and Gerald that when all was at rest within the Castle, she should descend by the turret stairs to the chapel, open from the inside the usual communication, carefully closing the door by which they were to depart immediately after the ceremony.

All this had appeared very simple to Lady

Julia when coolly planned beforehand ; but now so completely had her fears overwhelmed her usual energy and decision, that she shuddered at the thoughts of again encountering the gloom and darkness of the vault-like regions through which she must pass. Each moment but increased her nervousness, till at length she had worked herself up to such a pitch of excitement that as she looked around the silken hangings of her room seemed to assume the form of spectres, and amongst them was the pale face of the betrayed Florence mournfully distinct.

It was long before Lady Julia could summon up courage sufficient even to look from the casement in order to ascertain whether a glimmer of light was visible from any of the windows, but as she cast an anxious look around, the faint grey streak in the heavens warned her that the coming day would but increase the difficulties of her position. Not a moment

was to be lost; and hastily throwing a cloak over the gay ball-dress which she still wore, she prepared to descend.

She succeeded in groping her way to the top of the stairs, but her knees knocked together as she slowly opened the upper door, and felt the cold air rush from below upon her fevered brow. The repugnance she experienced to trusting herself in such utter darkness was at variance with her usual character, which was dauntless in the extreme when her interest was at stake; but a heavy sin lay upon her heart, and paralysed the energy that a more venial fault, (as she now termed all former ones) might have left unfettered. The shivering sense within was still more bitter than the chill which overspread her frame as the damp stones met her touch, and she sickened with disgust, as, having threaded her way at last to where the iron door stood ajar, she felt the slimy struggles of some noxious living

thing beneath her foot, and a bat roused from its slumbers flapped his heavy wings across her eyes.

Shuddering, she passed along; the waters of the moat were just visible with their dark and sullen gleam, and as she gathered up her cloak to pass beneath the low-arched door, an owl, disturbed by the fluttering of her white dress, flew across the moat with a hideous screech. It was on the same spot where the wretched cry of Florence had met her ear; and, frantic with terror, Lady Julia rushed forward to the chapel, and sunk fainting upon the stone floor within.

The altar was before her, the hallowed spot where her victim had been sacrificed, and that she and her guilty accomplice had dared to desecrate by such an act. She started up, no hope of rest was there for her, and hastily she undid the fastenings which secured the private entrance to the chapel; but when she sought

the outer door which led towards the park, to her horror and amazement she found it secured. Bolt, bar, and chain, all were in their places, and their ponderous weight resisted her utmost endeavours to remove them.

The key had been taken from the lock, it was therefore impossible that it could have been fastened except from within; and some person must have entered the chapel by the secret door through which she had just passed, for the state in which she had left Florence forbade her to indulge in the hope that Gerald could have conveyed her away otherwise than by the great door, near which his carriage had been stationed.

In an agony of fear Lady Julia passed her hands again and again over the iron-studded door. No hope remained; but as she turned to leave the chapel, a jingling sound upon the pavement startled her, and again she groped about and searched every corner in hopes of

discovering something that might give her a clue as to how the door had been made fast. All was vain, and she hurriedly left the chapel, for the marble tablets beneath her feet gleamed whiter and whiter each moment, and the groined arches above were discernible in the coming light.

Once more Lady Julia stood within the grating of the secret entrance. She had again twined the creeping ivy through the bars, and, drawing it carefully back, prepared to close the inner door. But as she paused for a moment to rest from her exertions, she fancied that the sound of steps along the vaulted passage which led to the stairs came upon her ear. She listened, but all was still. She resumed her task; but, as her hand rested upon the lock, the sound returned, and louder and more distinct did the stealthy tread appear till it came quite close to her, when it ceased altogether.

Paralysed with fear she remained motionless ; her hand still stretched forward as she grasped the key, which she felt to be her only protection, but so weak was she from terror that she could not draw the heavy door towards her. Suddenly her hand was seized, and a strong arm forcibly dragged her towards the grating. With a shriek she struggled to disengage herself ; her cloak dropped to the ground, and her white and silver dress was distinctly visible as the light fell upon it from without.

It seemed as if that one glimpse had been enough ; for, in another moment, her hand was released, and the sound of a heavy step growing fainter in the distance once more told her she was alone. Relieved from her terrible fear, in a few moments she recovered sufficiently to fasten the door, and reascended the stairs, carefully securing the entrance to the gallery, and, swiftly flying to her brother's

room, she deposited both keys in the drawer of the antique cabinet where they had lain for years. Once more safe in her own room, the confidence of Lady Julia began to return. Hastily divesting herself of her glittering dress, she swallowed a powerful cordial, and, bathing her throbbing temples in cold water, the nervous irritation from which she had suffered so much began to subside; and before long the stings of conscience became less acute, and her usual audacity and hardness of feeling had resumed their accustomed empire. She imagined herself beyond the possibility of detection, until suddenly recollecting the mysterious hand which had seized her arm at the bottom of the turret stairs, her fears in an instant revived. What if it should have been her brother? or the person whom, next to him, she feared most upon earth—Dr. Sands? The latter appeared certainly the most natural supposition; but, in either case, why should so much secrecy have

been observed? If the person had been one who had a right to question her, why should they not have spoken? This idea somewhat quieted the alarm of Lady Julia, and, after some reflection, she came to the conclusion that, whoever it might have been, it was evidently the object of the person to remain undiscovered; and that, even if he had recognised her (which she imagined could not have been the case), there was no danger of his bringing any accusation against her.

“What if I am accused,” exclaimed she; “by what means can it be proved that I am in any way implicated in the business? Who will dare to say that I know aught of such a scheme? And if they do, cannot I defend myself? and must I be made answerable for the sins of that baby-faced girl? In love, forsooth! she talk of love! Poor, grovelling fool! I could almost pity her or any woman whose

hopes of joy were fixed upon that most consummate of all villains, Gerald De Grey. And yet, how I once loved that man!—It was not love—it was the wild idolatry of madness!”

Lady Julia clasped her hands over her eyes, and remained for some minutes as if bowed down by the grief her thoughts had caused. Starting up, at length she exclaimed, as her eyes flashed fire, and she paced the room with rapid strides,—

“Love him! I did once; but now my soul is filled with hate more bitter even than that with which I look upon the face of that odious girl. The whole race of Brandons are hateful to my sight; and she—did she not dare to step between me and my dearest hopes? If all the fiends of darkness were let loose upon me at this moment, their torture would be welcome, so that I lose not my revenge! Revenge! delicious thought! How shall I triumph when I see that petted girl, with her demure look

and whining voice, come crawling to my feet to beg for one look of pity and protection! And I can spurn her—cast her off! Her adoring Gerald! In a month he will be sick of her, and then where will she be? I care not, so that never more she crosses my path. My very life was poisoned by her sight; and now, my proud uncle and my foolish aunt, how will you boast of your ‘matchless daughter—your lovely, innocent Florence!’ and look with scorn upon all others but your duteous child? And you too, Gerald, when they ask her at your hands? Ha!—ha! then shall I be avenged on both—avenged on all who have dared to slight or cross me. That thought is balm to all my sufferings. Gerald! Florence! I forgive you now. I am revenged—revenged—revenged!”

And Lady Julia, flinging herself upon her bed, continued to mutter the last words of the fearful ravings her overwrought senses had

produced ; till at last, worn out by the violence of her wicked mind, and the excitement she had undergone, she sunk into a deep and heavy sleep. .

CHAPTER X.

WITH the most happy feelings of self-complacency and delight did Lady Marwood rise from her bed on the morning that followed the birth-day of her son. The *fête* of the day before had succeeded beyond her most sanguine hopes. Every thing had gone right, and she herself had received a full share of the flattery and homage which was unsparingly bestowed upon the young Lord Marwood. It was long since she had experienced such an excess of gratification ; and all the feelings of family pride, maternal affection, and per-

sonal vanity, which had alternately swayed her bosom, now reposed in the most happy consciousness of success, and gave to her still handsome countenance an expression of suavity and content which it very seldom displayed, except when dressed in smiles in order to produce an effect in the world.

Lady Marwood, as she lay upon her sofa in the most becoming *peignoir*, sipping her chocolate, looked the very picture of happiness; and at that moment she probably would not have changed places with any one in the world. The return of her son appeared to have brightened her future prospects. His manner towards her had been so affectionate, so attentive, and yet so humble, that she imagined her influence over him must be unbounded, and visions of future grandeur and increased importance rose before her eyes. At his age, of course, he would not think of marrying, and her imagination revelled in

the idea of presiding over his princely establishment; and already she had arranged in her mind the plausible scheme of letting her own town house, and taking up her abode at that of her son, as, of course, he would want somebody to undertake the regulation of his household, and the arrangement of the numerous dinners, parties, and balls, which she intended to persuade him were necessary to his happiness. She would then, once again, find herself in that position in which she so much delighted; and, what with the vast importance of her son, the attractions of her daughter, and the excessive beauty of Florence, whom she intended to invite to pass the season with her, Lady Marwood flattered herself that she would be a person of no small consequence in the gay circles she loved to frequent, and in whose approving smile lay her principal ideas of happiness.

A few weeks seemed to have effected a

wonderful change in Lady Marwood's prospects, and she began to feel some little degree of compunction when she recollected how very little she had thought of her excellent son during his residence abroad, and how new were all the feelings of gratitude and affection with which she now regarded him; and she determined that, for the future, her kindness should be somewhat more demonstrative.

Just as she had arrived at this most praiseworthy resolution, she was aroused from her meditations by a knock at her door, and the portly figure of Mrs. Nichols, the prim old English housekeeper of the Castle, presented itself to her view.

"How do you do, Mrs. Nichols?" said Lady Marwood, in her most gracious manner, though she did not feel quite comfortable at the rather disturbed expression of the round red face upon which her eye rested. To the mistress of a house, the sudden appearance of

the housekeeper at an unwonted hour is a portentous event. It tells of a forthcoming history of domestic misfortunes at all times vexatious, but particularly so when the mind is full of pleasant thoughts; and Lady Marwood never felt less inclined than at this moment to enter into the details of petty arrangements, — to listen to the good woman's difficulties of "setting things to rights again," — of quarrelsome servants, broken china, or reckless waste, "which she could not see going on, and not just mention the thing to her ladyship."

"I suppose you are very much tired after all your exertions yesterday?" observed Lady Marwood, in answer to a low courtesy from Mrs. Nichols.

"Why, pretty well, my lady; but I should n't mind that if all had gone right," said the housekeeper, smoothing her black silk apron.

“Oh, but all did go right, I assure you, Mrs. Nichols; we were very well satisfied: Lord Marwood was quite delighted with every thing.”

“God bless him!” said the good woman, as her cheek became still more rosy; “it is hard any thing should vex him, and on his own birth-day, too! I’m sure his lordship will take it sadly to heart!”

“Oh, he is not easily vexed,” said Lady Marwood.

“Oh, no, my lady, I did not mean he was; I’m sure his lordship is the sweetest-tempered young gentleman ever was seen: but I fear — I declare I quite dread to see him, and so I thought I would step up to your ladyship first.”

“Why, what is the matter?” asked Lady Marwood, rather impatiently.

“I’m sure, my lady, I can’t — I don’t know how to say it, it is so very awkward — of one of the family, too!”

“What do you mean?” said Lady Marwood, looking rather frightened; “pray speak out, Mrs. Nichols. Is any one ill? — my son?”

“Oh, no! not ill, my lady; — but Miss Brandon! my lady — but perhaps your ladyship knows?”

“Knows what? — for God’s sake speak out!”

“Well, then, my lady, Miss Brandon is not here!”

“Not here! — Florence! — Why, it is impossible! she would never have gone home without telling me!”

“Oh! my lady, I fear she is not gone home; I do not know what has happened, — but she has not been in her room all night.”

“Good Heavens!” exclaimed Lady Marwood, starting up; “some accident — the moat — the drawbridge! Good God! if any thing has happened,” — and the agitated wo-

man covered her eyes with her hand. "Tell me," continued she, "what you know; are you sure she is missing?"

But as she raised her eyes to the face of the poor woman opposite to her, the look of shame and horror with which it was filled shocked her, and she remained gazing upon it with a stupified air.

"Oh! my lady," continued the weeping Mrs. Nichols, "I dare not say what I fear; but if she is gone, she is not gone alone. Oh, dear! oh, dear! that such a thing should have happened in the family, and on my lord's birth-day, too!"

Lady Marwood sunk back upon the sofa, and Mrs. Nichols, somewhat restored by a violent burst of tears, continued,—

"Why, you see, my lady, this morning, when the housemaid went in to open the windows in the blue room (I put Miss Brandon in the blue room because it was so cool

and pleasant), she found every thing just as she left it last night ; and as she came running to tell me about it, who should come in but Mr. Martin, the head-coachman, and says he, ‘So I find Mr. De Grey is off for the Continent last night ; I never heard a word of it till this morning, when the helper was telling me how his French valet packed up every thing at a minute’s warning, and went out of the yard at one o’clock in the morning with four posters. Well, to be sure, that’s sudden !’ Well, my lady, when I heard this I was all of a tremble, and up I came to have a look at the rooms ; but there they were, just as they were laid out for the night, and very sure no one had slept in either of them ; but before I would alarm your ladyship, I searched, with my own eyes, into every hole and corner of the Castle, and not a sign of Miss Brandon !”

Mrs. Nichols might have gone on for ever,

for her auditor had no power to interrupt the narrative that seemed to freeze her as she sat. In one glance she saw all that had happened, and the terrible consequences of it to herself came fearfully, mingling with the keen sense of disgrace to the family which such an event must entail. She appeared now to recollect, for the first time, that the girl who had been intrusted to her protection by her parents demanded somewhat more care than she had bestowed upon Florence. Completely occupied with herself, and her enjoyment of the scene of display with which she had been surrounded, she had scarcely condescended to observe the proceedings of her niece ; but what little she had seen of Mr. De Grey's attentions, joined to her previous knowledge of his character, left no doubt upon her mind of the terrible event which had occurred.

Her first inquiry was for her daughter, but Lady Julia was not up, and had desired that

she might not be disturbed. Unheeding the injunction, Lady Marwood immediately proceeded to her daughter's room, and poured into her ear the frightful tale for which she was so well prepared.

Lady Julia's exclamations of horror and surprise fully relieved the mind of Lady Marwood of all suspicion of her daughter having been in any way implicated. But though Lady Julia had long been accustomed to dictate to, and deceive, her mother, and was quite competent to the task, yet, notwithstanding her assurance, she actually trembled at the thought of confronting her brother, and shrunk from the idea of being subjected to the calm scrutiny of Dr. Sands. She dared not encounter the grave look of reproof which she felt would be turned upon her, even if no suspicion should arise in his mind as to the truth; but when she reflected upon the mysterious adventure of the night before,

her heart sickened, and the terrors of a guilty conscience again resumed their sway.

The fatigue of the previous evening afforded a plausible excuse for her remaining in her room during the whole of the day; but as the hour of dinner approached, she prepared herself for the dreaded encounter, as a protracted absence from the family-circle would, she knew, at once attract the observation she most wished to avoid. She had ascertained, through her attendants, that a note had been received from the fugitives; but as this was a point which had been agreed upon, she did not feel any anxiety to be made acquainted with its contents, especially as Lady Marwood had remained in her son's room ever since its arrival.

The tacit deference which is wrung from the evil-minded by the simple majesty of truth and virtue never was more apparent than in the involuntary submission and respect

with which Lady Julia secretly regarded her brother. That brother, her junior by so many years, over whom, had his character been one of common mould, she would have tyrannized, and whose opinions she would have laughed to scorn, now exercised over her a power which she fain would have denied even to herself. No word of unkindness, — no slighting expression towards her, had ever escaped her brother's lips; but the tact, which supplied the place of better feelings in the character of Lady Julia, told her that her levity was revolting to him, and her frivolous pursuits despised by one whom she affected to treat as a mere child.

For the last few hours, the thoughts of Lady Julia had dwelt incessantly upon her brother. In vain she repeated to herself that her fears were groundless, — that he possessed no right, no power, over her; still the dread of his displeasure was appalling to her, and it

was with the feelings of a culprit summoned to execution, that just as she had finished dressing, and was preparing to go to the drawing-room, she beheld Lord Marwood enter her dressing-room, and, sternly dismissing her attendants, take his seat upon a sofa exactly opposite to her.

For some moments there was a dead silence. The flippancy of Lady Julia seemed to have deserted her; and as she looked up and perceived the expression of pain and displeasure too clearly marked upon the speaking countenance of Lord Marwood, her heart seemed to wither in her breast.

“Julia,” he said at last, in a low and stifled voice, “I have come to you, not as the owner of this house—not as the head of a family which, until this hour, has been free from disgrace, and, above all, reproach; but I come as a friend—as a brother—to implore you to tell me all you know of

this unhappy business, — to tell me,” continued he, struggling to suppress his emotion, “that my too horrible suspicions are unfounded, — that my sister — my only sister — is free from blame, and that, at least, the stain of treachery and dishonour, in its blackest form, rests not upon one of my name! Tell me, I conjure you, — but speak truly and honestly, — What do you know of the flight of Florence Brandon?”

“I merely know,” stammered Lady Julia, averting her head, “that it has pleased her to run away with Mr. De Grey. I suppose you do not mean to make me answerable for such a folly?”

“Folly! — call it sin, and the name will be more appropriate. If your own heart acquit you of any participation in the deed, then, indeed, I will acquit you; but the matter rests not until I have sifted it to the bottom.”

“Why, how very grave you look, Mar-

wood! The fault is not ours if she chooses to run away, though I own it is disagreeable enough to have it happen just as she was staying with us. People are so inconsiderate about their friends. She might have foreseen that it would give rise to endless explanations with Sir William and Lady Brandon, and might have put off her elopement till she got home!"

"Julia! I am shocked to hear you talk in such a manner. If you suspected her attachment to De Grey, why did you not warn her parents of it, or even my mother, who, I am firmly persuaded, never had a suspicion of it until to-day?"

"Really, it was not my business. I had no idea of troubling myself about it. Who could think any girl was fool enough to throw herself away upon such a man as Mr. De Grey!"

"Julia, it *was* your business — nay, even your duty! Are we sent into this world to

think only of ourselves? Are social duties to be disregarded because no law enforces them? Are we to see others rushing to destruction and not stretch forth our hand to save them, or raise our voice in warning because we are not compelled to do so? But we *are* compelled; the laws of God—the laws of humanity and benevolence—demand it! It is every one's business—their duty, to save another from sin, if it be possible; and if in this case you have neglected it, may God forgive you!”

Awed by the solemnity of tone in which these words were uttered, Lady Julia did not answer; and Lord Marwood continued,—

“That girl was intrusted to your care, and to that of my mother,—but more especially to yours. As her friend—her companion, you must have known her thoughts. Why did you not warn her of her danger?”

“My dear Marwood,” said Lady Julia, who

began to hope that all was still safe, "you really lecture me as if I was a child: what on earth could I have had to say to an ill-conducted girl running away?"

"Do not speak thus of Florence. If ever there was innocence embodied in human form, it was in hers. It only needed to look upon her face to see that thought of wrong had never crossed her mind."

"You relax wonderfully in your austerity for some people, I perceive," said Lady Julia, with a scornful laugh.

"I speak but the truth. That girl knew not the name of sin; she has been deceived — entrapped, and without one friend to save her; and you, who in years and experience might have been a mother to her, have looked calmly on, if not abetted in her ruin. Good heavens! that pure, innocent creature, almost a child; what chance had she with such a reckless libertine as De Grey?"

“Very little, as she will find to her cost before long,” exclaimed Lady Julia, who could scarcely repress a smile of triumph. “Pray, have you heard any thing of them since they went?”

“It is of what occurred before they went,” said Lord Marwood, with increased seriousness of manner, “that I would question you. This jewel,” continued he, drawing from his pocket a diamond brooch in the form of a rose, “is yours. You wore it yesterday—at dinner—at the ball! Say, then, how came it within the chapel-door?”

“How can I tell?” stammered Lady Julia. “It might have dropped, and some one have picked it up.”

“The chapel-door was locked inside, and yet before daylight it was found open, though the key of the private entrance was in my possession. Julia, answer me one word”—and he gasped for breath as he seized the

hand of his sister—"you were seen last night as you entered the chapel by the secret door; say—only say—were you present at the marriage? Knew you aught of it?"

"I solemnly swear I was not present!" said Lady Julia, trembling from head to foot; for by the question she knew some untoward discovery had been made.

It had been arranged between her and Gerald that the fact of the marriage having taken place at Marwood should not be mentioned; but that it should be announced the day after as having been solemnized at some distant village.

"Nor that you knew of any preparation for such a marriage?" continued Lord Marwood; and upon receiving the promised assurance, he put into her hand the letter containing the detailed account of the marriage, and their subsequent flight; and though it absolved all others from any share in the

plot, Lady Julia felt herself convicted. She dared not meet her brother's look ; and as her eye fell upon the signature of the unhappy girl whom she had betrayed, the words " Florence De Grey " seemed to stand out in letters of fire before her.

With a look of agony Lord Marwood marked the trembling of her frame, and the guilt which spoke in every feature, though in vain she struggled to suppress her emotion, for her lips were blanched with terror. The touch of her brother's hand was as an iron grasp, and as the low sound of the words, " Julia, after this day we meet no more," reached her ear, it was as a voice from the tomb, coming with its dull, sepulchral tone to charge her with her sin. Trembling and confounded, the last remains of courage gave way, and she sunk upon her knees at her brother's feet.

" Forgive me ! — oh, forgive me, Marwood ! " she exclaimed, as she raised her

clasped hands in supplication. "Do not betray me to my mother, and I will confess to you."

"Wretched girl!" replied her brother, "I will not betray you. Your own conscience, if you have any, will be your most severe tormentor."

Overcome by the shock of finding his suspicions confirmed, Lord Marwood buried his face in his hands, and sobbed aloud, while his sister, whose agitation was that of fear, and not repentance, inveterate in her wickedness and duplicity, gave such a garbled statement of the affair as she hoped would exonerate her from all blame, except that of not having interfered to prevent the accomplishment of the design.

But Lord Marwood was not so easily deceived. Her hatred to Florence, her revenge upon Gerald, remained a secret to him, but he knew enough to make him thoroughly

despise her of whom, until now, he had only disapproved. His resolution was taken, and before she had finished speaking, he had decided upon his future course.

“Julia,” he said calmly, after a silence of some minutes, “I do not wish to hear your excuses. The details are unnecessary, for the fact speaks but too plainly. You have been guilty of an offence which, in your worldly manner of judging, may appear excusable; but which, to those who think seriously of the imperative duty God has commanded us all to exercise towards each other, is without palliation. There is no depravity so great as that of the mind that can deliberately administer evil counsel to another. None can know the extent of their crime who do so. None can foresee the gradations of sin into which an innocent person may at last fall, whose first fault has been, as it were, sanctioned by their advice.

As a woman, you should have known the temptations to which a woman is exposed. You must have known it—you did know it; and yet you could look on, and even assist at the sacrifice of one as pure, as spotless as an angel! One word from you might have saved her. One word of bad advice from the lips of one woman to another is more powerful than all the arguments—the prayers even, of a lover. She may distrust, and shrink from the anxious entreaty of him who kneels at her feet, but she will rely and act upon the pernicious counsels of a female friend. There is a protection in the idea, that one of her own sex can see no harm in the course she recommends, that to a wavering and excited mind is of deadly influence. Julia! had you considered this, your fault would not appear to you as lightly as it now does. You are answerable to God for the future fate of that unhappy girl. You

know too much of the world to be ignorant of De Grey's character, and can you secure to her the happiness you have held out to her view? Dazzled by his beauty, and worked upon by the grace of his manner and speciousness of his words, what girl of her age could read his nature, could see in him the libertine—the reckless defier of all that is good and holy,—the selfish, cold-hearted being that he really is? But you knew it; and, great heavens! you could give her—the pride—the darling of her parents, to such a man! Julia, what will be your answer when they ask you for their child?"

"Really, Marwood," said Lady Julia, more astonished than affected by the sentiments of her brother "I must say, you are very unjust. I am ready to acknowledge it might have been wise to have discouraged this foolish affair, but I really cannot anticipate that all the evils you imagine will arise

from a girl making a bad match. It happens every day, and yet people seem to me to get on very well."

The brow of Lord Marwood darkened, and his voice grew more sorrowful as he replied, —

"I will not dispute the point with you. My words can have but little effect if your own heart can exonerate you from blame. My opinions are widely different; and as all community of thought between us is for ever destroyed, I shall no longer continue to harass you with a presence which can be productive of nothing but discomfort to you. To-morrow I shall leave the Castle, and shall not return to it while you remain here. It is my intention to take up my abode finally at home; therefore, you had better prepare my mother as to the impossibility of our continuing to live together. It will annoy her, I have no doubt, but I will not live with

one whom I distrust, and who has the honour of her family so little at heart."

"Oh, very well," replied Lady Julia, with an attempt at gaiety, "I am sure I never was less anxious for any thing than to be moped up here. I always hated the place."

"Then you will have the fewer regrets at leaving it," observed Lord Marwood, coldly.

"Don't fancy I shall regret it. But," continued Lady Julia, observing the frown which deepened on Lord Marwood's brow, "I conclude that you do not want to expose me to a second edition of all this sermon. I depend upon your promise of not enlightening mamma upon the subject. She is quite disagreeable enough to live with as it is, without having an additional grievance to bring forward upon every occasion."

Lord Marwood rose abruptly. The tone,

and disposition of his sister shocked and disgusted him beyond all endurance.

“I will remember my promise. You shall have no reason to complain of me. And now, farewell. And may God forgive you,” he added fervently, as he left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

Two days had elapsed since Florence had become a wife. Two days only since that awful moment when she had left all, forgotten all, to follow the steps of him whom she loved; and yet these few hours, instead of the happiness which ought to have been her portion, had not only filled the mind of Florence with the tortures of remorse, but thrown over the future the chilling blight of an uncertainty for which she was totally unprepared.

At Florence's entreaty Gerald had consented to remain within a short distance

of Marwood Castle, and they had taken up their abode at the nearest inn, until they should receive an answer to the united letters with which they (or rather Florence) hoped to appease the anger and unhappiness of her offended parents.

It was not without some difficulty that Gerald had yielded to this first request on her part. He was most urgent in his anxiety that they should at once leave England, but the grief of Florence was so overwhelming at the idea of not first obtaining the pardon and blessing of her parents, that he ceased to insist upon her making an effort which appeared beyond her strength. How anxiously did she count the hours which must elapse before the return of the messenger who had been despatched with the account of their marriage to Lady Marwood! From Wandesford they could not hear so soon, but even from her aunt, Florence longed for one

word of forgiveness. Julia, too, she was sure, would write ; and she looked for a long and detailed account of the efforts she would have made in her favour.

The trusting heart of Florence relied fondly on all whom she loved. Her own impulses were too genuine and too pure to allow of her doubting the faith of others. Her intercourse with the world had been so limited that, beyond the circle of her family, she knew nothing. All there had been good, all had been true and kind ; and, from her cradle, she had been cherished and nurtured upon gentle words and tender looks of love. When all around is fair we think not of the storm, and in the gladness of its own bright day, the young heart feels as though sunshine was upon all the world.

If Florence had thought much upon the variety of character which was beyond her own circle, she had judged of it by what

she already knew; and, open-hearted and sincere, she ascribed to others the noble feelings inherent in her own nature. The sin she had committed in deceiving her parents bowed her to the earth; and now that, no longer distracted by the fear of losing Gerald, her mind rested continually upon one subject, the torture of her thoughts became too great for endurance. Her chief reliance was upon the zealous efforts of Lady Julia to obtain her pardon. She called to mind her cousin's constant advice, and fearless assurances that all would be immediately forgiven; and felt certain that, though she had not mentioned it in the hurry of the moment, she would be herself the bearer of the news to Wandesford, and would never leave the spot until she could bring a parent's blessing to heal the wounded heart of an offending but repentant child.

The whole of the day had passed, and yet

Florence could not bring herself to leave the window of the little parlour of the inn. She had watched there for so long that her eyes ached as she gazed upon the white road glaring in the sun; but now it was changed to the delicious glow of sunset; and tired with the confinement which he had shared the whole day with Florence, Gerald had just left the house to stroll through the neighbouring fields, when a horseman appeared in the distance. Florence recognised the long-expected messenger at once, and looked anxiously from the window, hoping that Gerald was still within reach; but he was not to be seen, and Florence grieved over the prolonged anxiety which she thought he would feel during his walk.

Two letters were immediately delivered to her. One was addressed to Gerald, and she knew it was the writing of Lady Marwood. How she longed to open it, but she would

not venture as Gerald had not expressed a wish upon the subject; but she felt dreadfully disappointed at seeing that evidently there was no enclosure for her, for the letter was very thin, and seemed merely to contain one sheet of note paper.

Florence's heart swelled at the thoughts of Julia's not having written, and she turned for comfort to her other letter. It was addressed to "Miss Brandon;" and Florence started at perceiving that instead of the usual writing, it was directed by her father. She hastily tore it open and read as follows:—

“MY DEAREST CHILD,

“I have this moment received intelligence which has caused the first feelings of serious displeasure I have ever entertained towards you. It comes from an old and valued friend; and, accompanied as it is with an urgent prayer for my instant

interference, I feel that I should not be justified in neglecting the advice it contains. I am informed that since you have been at Marwood, the attentions of Mr. De Grey have been of a nature such as to leave no doubt of his admiration and preference for you. Though surprised at such intelligence, I cannot think it extraordinary; but when I am informed that such attentions are not only received, but encouraged by you, I must say that I am not a little shocked at the total want of dignity and regard for propriety such conduct displays. I was not aware that Mr. De Grey was at Marwood. Florence, why have you concealed this fact? The circumstance speaks volumes against you. Why have you concealed from your mother that Mr. De Grey presumed to look upon you otherwise than in the light of a friend? There can be but one reason for your having done so,—because his attentions were agree-

able to you. And by such encouragement what do you propose to yourself? Do you think that a daughter of mine—that Miss Brandon is to be allowed to carry on sentimental flirtations with any man who chooses to pay her attention, like an ill-educated, low-born girl? For I suppose that the idea of marriage can never have occurred either to you or to the gentleman who is pleased to make his pastime of one to whom he is in no way entitled to aspire. And were he even in a position to sanction his making a serious proposal to you, no power on earth should ever induce me to consent to the match. Florence, I would rather see you in your grave than married to Gerald De Grey! Beware, then, how you encourage his attentions. But, that I may not seem harsh to you, my child, I will state my reasons for what I have said. To do so fully would be to stain your mind with much that I would

not have you to know ; but when I tell you that, with all his fascinating exterior, he is a thorough specimen of that most depraved and heartless being, ‘ a dissipated man of the world ;’ believe me, that in those few words is comprised all that would ensure the most bitter misery to her who placed her happiness in his keeping. You are too young—too innocent, to judge of such a character. God forbid that you should be able to read it! A man of his stamp is incapable of affection. His one object is *self*! His love is but ill-regulated passion. Were you ever his wife, the moment he grew tired of you he would neglect, perhaps ill-use, you. My child, listen to one who has your interest at heart. I do not speak in pride, I do not write in anger, though, I confess, both feelings have been aroused by the letter now lying before me. Your mother will not write to you to-day. She knows that I am writing;

but I have not told her the reason of my doing so, for I would not distress her by letting her see that another was aware of what her own child had concealed from her. Return to us, my Florence. Come back, and take your accustomed place. We have missed you very much; and your poor mother is lonely and unhappy without you. Return to your home, my child. Your only true friends are here. Return, and I will forgive this first disappointment you have ever caused me. But, remember I shall trust to your honour, that from this moment no symptom of encouragement shall ever be given by you to Mr. De Grey, otherwise you will incur my everlasting displeasure.

“Your affectionate Father,

“WILLIAM BRANDON.”

Florence had read the letter through, and yet still continued to gaze upon it. With

blanched cheek and parted lips, she sat as if some sudden touch had changed her to a statue of despair. Unable to collect her thoughts, she held the letter before her, and yet could not read it again. The shock of its contents had paralysed her; and it was long before returning consciousness allowed her the power even of ascertaining the extent of her own wretchedness. She did not weep. A sensation of fear had frozen up her tears, and the new direction which had been given to her thoughts opened before her such a life of anguish and heavy trial, that her heart seemed to wither at the prospect.

It was long before she could sufficiently recover herself to read over again the letter she still held in her hand; but at length she began slowly to consider the words which it contained. "I would rather see you in your grave than married to Gerald De Grey." How often did the unhappy Florence repeat

this to herself. It was as the sentence of her fate. Not only did it destroy all chance of her pardon, but it forbade the existence of hope. That hope for which she had sinned—that hope which had sustained her until this moment, the hope of happiness from Gerald's love—all seemed to be annihilated by these few words. She knew that what her father had written he believed to be the truth. He was not a man of words; and the sternness with which he adhered to an opinion once formed, or a determination once taken, forbade her to hope much from any intercession that might be made for her.

And Gerald;—but as Florence's thoughts turned to him, her heart rebelled against the belief her father's words would have inspired. It could not be that he was such as that letter represented him; and at the thought of the injustice with which he had been accused, tears gushed from the eyes of the

unhappy Florence: and she bitterly reproached herself for having, at the first moment, believed that he ever could be undeserving of the fond affection with which she regarded him.

The ardent and devoted Gerald,—how could she believe him to be false or heartless? And yet her heart trembled. Her father's letter was before her—her father, whose honour and integrity she knew to be undoubted—would he have expressed himself so strongly upon a point which was uncertain? She did not dare to doubt that such was his real opinion; and yet, why had he never declared it before?

Unhappy Florence! She felt in the position of one who has drank of a cup and learns that the draught was poisoned. And was not her cup poisoned at that moment? Had not the slow, consuming torture of suspicion and distrust entered into her soul? Her mind

was a chaos of unhappy thoughts, each one contending for the mastery, and the last ever seeming more wretched than its predecessor.

Overwhelmed by her misery, Florence had taken no heed of time until the voice of Gerald roused her to consciousness. Hastily concealing the letter, she flew to meet him; and the wildness of her manner shewed him but too plainly that something had occurred which had diminished the hope of pardon that had hitherto sustained her courage. But, as she did not speak, he forbore to notice her increased agitation, and quietly took the unopened letter to which she pointed as it lay upon the table.

Any intercourse with the family of Florence was exactly what, at the moment, Gerald De Grey wished to avoid; and it was no little relief to his anxiety when, upon opening the letter of Lady Marwood, he found it to contain only a few cold and formal lines,

saying, "that, as Florence had chosen to act in so decided a manner while under her care, she must now decline, both for herself and her daughter, any further communication with one who could be guilty of such flagrant impropriety and disobedience."

The answer was precisely what Gerald expected it to be; but even his cold heart was pained as he raised his eyes and saw the look of intense anxiety with which his poor victim was watching his countenance.

"What does she say?" at last Florence ventured to ask, for Gerald stood as if irresolute with the letter still in his hand.

"Just what one might expect from such a cold, selfish, odious woman as she is!" exclaimed Gerald.

It was the first time he had ever expressed himself in such terms of her aunt, and Florence was stunned by the contempt of his manner. It seemed to her as if every one

had suddenly changed their character; for, till now, if Lady Marwood had been neglectful, she had never been unkind. Gerald gave the letter into her trembling hand. Florence glanced over it.

“Not one word from Julia!—not one—not even a message!” she cried, as she burst into tears. “Oh! if she had been in distress or in disgrace, what would I not have done to comfort her?”

“She is as heartless and good-for-nothing as her mother!” said Gerald, bitterly.

Florence raised her eyes in astonishment.

“You did not think so once, Gerald. You could not think so when you used to praise her, and tell me to follow her advice. Dear Gerald, what do you mean?”

“I mean that any one who could behave so to you must be bad and contemptible, and that you are much better without their

society," said Gerald, evasively. "There is nothing for you to regret in it."

"Until now, Julia has always been kind to me. I cannot forget that in a moment ;" and the tears of Florence flowed afresh.

The scene appeared rather to weary Gerald ; but he drew her to his breast, and, kissing away her tears, endeavoured to comfort her.

"Gerald," said she, suddenly, "I have but one hope. Let us go home. Let us not wait for the answer to the letter, but go at once to Wandesford. My father will be very angry ; but he will not refuse his pardon when we kneel to him to ask it. My mother, too, will intercede for us ; she will not cast off her child. She will not drive me from her door ; and when they see our attachment to each other, and that we devote ourselves to them, and do all we can to efface the recollection of our fault, they will forgive us. Oh ! they will, Gerald, for they know

how I love them. They will not break my heart by refusing to hear my prayer."

The brow of Gerald darkened as he listened to these words; but Florence, sobbing, had covered her face with her hands, and saw not the look of annoyance with which her petition was received.

"Dearest," replied he, in his softest tone, "what you ask is impossible. If Sir William Brandon refuses to receive me into his house, I cannot force myself upon his presence. It might lead to consequences of which you are not aware."

"I think even, painful as it might be, it would be the best thing for us to do," urged Florence, timidly. "Gerald, you know how I love my own home."

"It is quite impossible," answered Gerald, calmly. The tone of his voice chilled the heart of Florence as she exclaimed,—

"But why not go to Cleaveden Abbey?"

Your mother,—surely *your* mother, Gerald, would receive us, and there we should be so near home. Something might be done; for I feel,” continued she, as with a shudder she remembered the letter which lay concealed in her bosom, “that it will not be very easy to overcome the displeasure of my father.”

“It would be still more difficult to appease the anger of mine. I would not for worlds have to reason him and my mother out of their old-fashioned prejudices. It would drive me wild. No, Florence, we must leave it to time. Time does wonders in those cases; for, as for undergoing all the torment of family feuds, and prayers, and reconciliations, it is quite beyond my power. It would be useless, too,” continued he, with a suppressed yawn.

Florence withdrew herself from the encircling arm of her husband, and sat down upon the sofa at a little distance. The manner of

Gerald, more than his words, had wounded her deeply.

Gerald perceived her unhappiness, and immediately exerted himself to remove the impression he had made. Gently reproaching her for the little joy she appeared to feel in his presence, he succeeded at length in restoring her to some appearance of tranquillity; and he even promised, that should the answer from Wandesford appear to hold out any hope of their being received there, he would immediately hasten with her to her own home.

It came at last—that anxiously expected answer, and with it expired the last hope of forgiveness which still fluttered in the bosom of the unhappy Florence. Not only did her father refuse to see her, but he peremptorily commanded, that with that letter all communication should cease for ever between his disobedient child and the rest of her family;

and warned her, that should she attempt to write, her letters should be returned unopened.

Condemned, abandoned by all whom she held dear upon earth, an outcast from her home, the wretched Florence bowed her head beneath the dreadful fate she had brought upon herself, and silently prepared to leave her country, and follow through the world the only being upon whom her hopes now dared to rest, and for whose sake she had already made so fearful a sacrifice.

CHAPTER XII.

EVEN when supported by the consciousness that our actions are based upon the purest motives, the smallest doubt as to how they may be appreciated by the individual for whom we have perhaps made the sacrifice, is never a very agreeable sensation. There is nothing more chilling to a generous mind than the calm and thankless manner in which a service that has been performed, perhaps at great risk and trouble, is sometimes received by the very person for whose benefit it had been undertaken.

How often is the enthusiasm inspired by the anxiety of friendship thrown back upon

the heart of the noble and the true, by the stubborn pride, or peevish littleness, which is unable to appreciate generosity of thought or action, and which secretly winces under the galling sense of obligation! If there is a moment when we are ready to believe that the cold ingratitude and meanness of spirit which is to be found in the world is universal, it is when, having acted for another with more zeal than we should probably have exerted for ourselves, we are received by that very person with an expression of manner which implies that we have meddled with what did not concern us, and that though we may have been extremely useful, they are not at all obliged to us for having shewn ourselves more clever, more active, and more generous than themselves.

A great mind is the gift wherein is the source of all real power; but how often can the least among the mean inflict torture upon

the sensitive nature of superior intellect and feeling? It is in the littleness of such persons that dwells their power of annoyance; but though the pain for the moment may be acute, it will soon be succeeded by contempt, and will pass away harmless.

More than once had an oppressive sensation, arising from reflections upon this point, filled the breast of Lord Marwood during his journey from the Castle to Wandesford Park, and yet not for an instant had he hesitated in the course he intended to pursue. To throw himself at the feet of Sir William Brandon and obtain the pardon of Florence, was the object which he had at heart; and there were moments when, carried away by the warmth of his own ardent and affectionate disposition, he did not despair of its accomplishment. But at others the character of his uncle, and his own recollection of the stern pride which had so often appalled him,

as in his boyish days he had seen it aroused or offended, struck upon his heart with a chill, and made him doubtful of the reception which awaited him. To interfere between a father and his child, he knew to be a dangerous and a difficult task; but he thought upon the extreme youth and innocence of her who had been so sorely tempted; he pictured to himself her agony at being excluded from her home, and the unhappiness which probably awaited her when the fever of passion should have passed away, and she should discover the real disposition of him who could, for a time, so well have deceived even a more experienced observer.

Lord Marwood thought of all this, and forgot his own feelings and the awkwardness of presenting himself in a house from which he and his whole family had been formally excluded by Sir William Brandon's letters. Many would have found in the fierceness of

anger with which the irritated father had charged them with the destruction of his child, a sufficient excuse for refraining for ever from all attempt at reconciliation. But Lord Marwood was not of the number. He cared not for himself, but the weak and the helpless cried to him for support, and his noble heart responded to the call; and at the moment poor Florence was leaving her native country, broken-hearted, and sinking beneath the cruelty of those to whom she had looked for intercession with her parents, her almost stranger cousin was on his way, unasked, uncalled upon, save by the knowledge of her distress, to kneel before her father and implore her pardon.

Arrived at Wandesford, Lord Marwood sprung from his carriage and, hastily following the servant, entered his uncle's room almost at the moment that his name was announced.

Sir William was sitting alone in his library; but as the light of the lamp which he hurriedly pushed to a distance as the door opened, fell upon his face, the traces of tears, and the flushed and heavy look of sorrow, were distinctly visible. It was some years since he had seen his nephew, and for a moment he seemed to gaze with surprise upon the handsome young man who stood before him; but as he listened to the first words of apology and affection which Lord Marwood falteringly addressed to him, the recollection of his loss seemed to rush upon his mind, and connecting itself with the very name of Marwood, the chastened expression of his countenance vanished, and starting to his feet he commanded his nephew, in the harshest manner, instantly to leave him.

“I will not leave you, sir, until you have heard me. Then, indeed, if you still wish it, you shall be obeyed,” said Lord Marwood, in a firm but respectful tone.

“For what are you here?” cried Sir William, fiercely. “Are you come to insult the father of the child you have destroyed? Leave me, and instantly; if you would not have me curse you where you stand!”

“Not till you have heard me,” repeated Lord Marwood.

“I will not hear you:—I will not listen to you. Where is my child—my Florence?” cried the wretched father, distractedly. “I trusted her to you;—I sent her from home;—where is she now?”

“Alas! alas! Would that I could restore her to you!” exclaimed the young man, in a voice of deep feeling.

“Leave me!—do not mock me with the pretence of sorrow! What can you know of it? Leave me, again I say! The very name of Marwood is odious to me; let me never hear it again.”

“You do me wrong, Sir William,” said Lord Marwood, proudly. “Had I not felt

for your sorrow, why should I now be here? You are unjust—my heart bleeds for your sufferings, as it does for the unhappy fate of my poor cousin.”

The whole frankness with which these words were spoken appeared for a moment to pacify the anger of Sir William. It is difficult to resist the voice of truth; but though it might calm the passion, it but inflamed the pride of him to whom it was addressed, and a word of pity bestowed upon his disobedient child, again hardened the feelings which the emotion his nephew had displayed had almost begun to mollify.

“Name her not!” exclaimed he, sternly. “A disobedient, ungrateful girl!—a disgrace to the name of Brandon!”

“She has erred—she has been guilty, I allow—but oh! she is not ungrateful. Have pity on her. She has been tempted—she is but a child—have mercy on her, and forgive her.”

“Forgive her! Never while I breathe! Never again shall she enter these doors!”

The slow and determined manner in which these words were uttered fell freezingly on the heart of Lord Marwood, but he would not abandon all hope, and passionately continued his entreaty.

“Oh! do not say such words; consider her youth—her inexperience, and the advantage that villain must have had over her. Was there no fault in permitting her to form an intimacy with one of his nature?”

“How!—you would reproach *me* with her misconduct?” cried Sir William, whose own conscience had more than once suggested the same idea. “You would charge *me* with having neglected my child? At your mature age no doubt you understand the regulation of a family better than I do. I thank you for the lesson.”

Unmoved by the bitter taunt, Lord Marwood continued,—

“ As you hope for mercy, do not close your heart against your unhappy child. She has been weak, but she is not wicked:—we are not all strong to resist temptation. Consider her sufferings;—even now she has left England: what will become of her hereafter, for her dream of happiness will soon be over? She knows not him whom she has chosen—her punishment will be sufficient when she finds that his love is gone. Do not drive her to despair; hold out some little hope of pardon, even a distant one; for your own sake—for her mother’s sake, do not cast her off for ever. Have pity on her—on yourself—upon us all.”

As Lord Marwood paused, overcome by the deep agitation which almost choked his utterance, Sir William Brandon felt that the hand which his nephew had taken, and still held forcibly within his own, was bedewed with tears. Such sorrow could not be coun-

terfeit,—such heartfelt entreaty could not be meant as a mockery of his wo, and the stern nature of Sir William began to give way before the influence of unexpected sympathy. His heart was not bad, though his good qualities lay buried beneath the load of an ungovernable pride; and gazing upon the noble countenance of his nephew, now raised in supplication towards him as the tears streamed down his cheeks, the breaking heart of the parent was touched by the sight of sorrow, and drawing the young man towards him he clasped him fondly in his arms, while the heaving of his own breast shewed how deeply he was affected.

A thrill of joy shot through the frame of Lord Marwood, and long and silently did he watch the workings of that grief which by its own violence he hoped would at length exhaust itself. And it did exhaust itself, and the storm of passion and of fierce anger had

passed away, and the softened feelings of sorrow had taken the place of ungoverned violence, before Sir William spoke again; and as Lord Marwood listened to the calmer tone, and felt the kind pressure of his uncle's hand, which he still held within his own, he blessed the goodness of God who had inspired him with the thought of undertaking what he had done. The insulting manner with which he had been received, — the galling doubts of his sincerity expressed by his uncle, all passed away from his mind as he felt the reviving of hope in his bosom.

But Lord Marwood's sanguine nature had led him too rapidly to the conclusion he wished for; and bitter was the disappointment he experienced, when, upon listening to the calm determination of his uncle, he found him still more resolved than even during the paroxysms of rage, not to admit his rebellious child again to his presence.

“Consider,” said he, to his distressed and anxious listener, “that I have other daughters, and of an age when such an example might be of the most injurious tendency. How can I constantly impress upon them the duty of obedience and submission, and yet receive back to my affection one who has so cruelly deceived me, — one who has unhesitatingly thrown off all allegiance to parents who idolized her? How can I endeavour to instil into their minds the principles of honour and gratitude, the nice observance of which I hold to be as necessary to a woman’s character as to that of a man, and yet overlook the conduct of him who has not only destroyed my child, but returned with the blackest treachery and ingratitude the kindness which, from his childhood, he had received from my hands? No — it is impossible; she has chosen for herself, and by her choice she must abide. If,” continued the unhappy father, in a less steady

tone, "I have failed in watchfulness over one child, let me not sacrifice the others with which God has blessed me. They are equally dear — at least, they ought to be so."

These last words he murmured to himself; for as the recollection of his beloved and beautiful Florence rose more vividly, his bursting heart whispered to him that till now he had scarcely known the depth of affection with which he regarded her. Even now, degraded as he felt her to be, he would have given worlds to have pardoned and embraced her: but his pride, his horror of inconsistency, and also his sense of duty to his remaining daughters, forbade it; and Lord Marwood saw, with grief, that if ever the erring Florence was restored to her home, it must be a work of years.

CHAPTER XIII.

LORD MARWOOD had been for some days at Wandesford before he was admitted to the presence of Lady Brandon. It was not that she in any way participated in the harsh sentiments which her husband had expressed towards his nephew. She fully acquitted him of all knowledge or participation in the event which had caused their sorrow, though her heart could not equally absolve his sister. But Lady Brandon knew too much of her daughter's nature not to be certain that all evil advice or encouragement would have been harmless, had it not been seconded strongly by the secret affections of Florence.

Now that it was too late, the wretched mother called to mind a thousand little circumstances which might have revealed to her the secret of her child's sorrow ; and her own bereavement fell upon her with double weight, as she bitterly reproached herself for the careless guardianship of her treasure. She had watched it to the best of her ability : her care had been unceasing, her love unbounded, and yet it had been stolen from her bosom ; and now that it was gone, sullied, degraded, the unhappy mother prized it more than ever, and tried to exonerate her thankless child by eagerly ascribing to herself a want of care and tenderness of which the most evil-minded could not have accused her.

When first apprised of Lord Marwood's arrival, the shock of her loss had been too recent, and her agony of sorrow too dreadful, to admit of the possibility of her seeing him,

connected, as he appeared to be, with her misfortune ; she felt that even a total stranger would have excited less painful sensations in her bosom : but, after some days, she became more reconciled to the idea of his presence, and won upon by the nobleness with which he had alone undertaken to plead the cause of her unhappy child, she at length consented to admit him to her room.

The first meeting was a scene of the most heart-rending distress ; for so worn-down and humbled was the unhappy woman by her daughter's disobedience, that she had neither mental nor bodily strength to struggle with her grief. But soon the winning frankness and sincerity which spoke in every word and look of the noble-minded young man, gained upon her, as it already had done upon her husband ; and in the sympathy and kindness which he entered into all her feelings, and constantly held out to her the

hope, however distant, that her child would one day be restored to her, she found a comfort which, until that moment, she had not believed could still exist for her in this world.

For hours every day would Lady Brandon keep her nephew by her side, and make him repeat even the least trifle which had occurred previous to the day which had terminated so fatally; and the blessing of the broken-hearted mother was tremblingly bestowed upon him who had spoken with such honest conviction of the innate purity and goodness of heart of one who, in a moment of temptation, had fallen away.

Lord Marwood persisted in believing his cousin guiltless of all premeditated sin, and in the gentleness of his nature was more inclined to pity than to blame; but his indignation against Mr. De Grey knew no bounds, and bitterly did he regret that in the very

baseness for which he would have spurned him, as unworthy of toleration, lay his sure defence against the only means by which hatred and scorn of his conduct could have been expressed. He could not lift his hand against the husband of the poor outcast. If he fell, what would become of her who had sacrificed her all for his sake? To punish him would be to tear from her breast the last hope of comfort upon the earth. It could not be; and the only reparation that was in his power to make to the forsaken parents, Lord Marwood cheerfully and anxiously offered to their acceptance. His time, his affectionate attentions, were devoted to them; and he felt himself amply repaid, if sometimes they appeared less suffering, and to wish for the continuance of his society.

It was a sad and touching spectacle to behold the change in this once bright and happy family; and deeply did the wickedness

of him who had caused it sink into the heart of that young man as he reflected upon it: and then did he, more than ever, bless the faithful friend who had been to him as a father, and who had taught him that the ways of the world are not the ways of God. Young as he was, he was not to be laughed out of his principles, nor could he bring himself to attempt to palliate what was wrong by masking it under a specious name. It needed but to look upon those who had been suddenly reduced to misery, to feel the treachery and ingratitude of its author in its darkest sense.

The day that formerly passed in gaiety and happiness now dragged wearily on, and each member of the family seemed but to have one anxiety—to keep aloof from the others, and brood over their grief in solitude and in silence. And in the evening—the evening that at Wandesford ever presented the truest picture of all that is most beautiful

in domestic unity and affection — what was it now? Where was the light laugh and the merry jest, the gay song or the still more joyous sound of happy voices and loving words? — Gone! — all gone with that beaming one, whose step and smile told only of gladness, whose look was of love, and whose lightest word brought sunshine to the heart. All was dark where hope and joy had so lately shone!

There, in the same room, in his accustomed place, might still be seen the stately form of Sir William Brandon; but sorrow sat upon his brow and struggled with the lofty look of pride it usually wore. Now, how was it humbled! His voice, too, sounded on the ear; but, as he tried to utter the commonplace words with which he fain would have concealed the workings of his thoughts, it would tremble, or sink into sadness, as any thing that referred to other days arose.

Still more touching was the mute sorrow of the two young girls, the sisters of the unhappy Florence, who sat together a little apart from the rest. Their buoyant spirits crushed, their young and innocent hearts shocked and frightened by their sister's fault, they would sit for hours with their hands locked in each other's, watching the motionless figure of their poor mother; who, with her face averted, seemed fearful even to meet the eye of those so dear, and in silent wretchedness gave no sign of life, save when her labouring breast could not stifle the suppressed groan which told her anguish. Then would these two fair children press closer together; and as they looked up at each other in helpless grief for their mother's sufferings, the heavy tears would roll down their cheeks, and their lips move in silent prayer that the sorrow they could not soothe might be ministered to from above.

This was the wretched scene upon which Lord Marwood gazed with aching heart. This was the hopeless misery brought into a happy family by an unprincipled "man of the world."

CHAPTER XIV.

It would be difficult to imagine feelings of more bitter disappointment and vexation than those which agitated the bosom of Lady Marwood, as she stepped into the carriage which was to convey her away from the magnificent castle where she had lately reigned as queen. As it faded from her sight, with it vanished all the hopes in which she had lately indulged. Not a chance of realizing any one of them now remained to her; and she suddenly beheld herself once more thrown upon her own resources at the very moment when she had imagined that her future life was to present an

unvarying round of luxurious pleasure and ostentatious display.

Lady Marwood had always been as Lady Julia respectfully described her, “disagreeable enough to live with;” but her former disagreeableness was as nothing when compared to the increase of irritation and selfishness which had accrued from the determination of her son. In vain she had at first attempted by fair words and entreaty to alter it,—in vain did she daily despatch page after page of close writing to prove that she never could be chargeable with neglect towards her unhappy niece, and that Lord Marwood laboured under some strong delusion in imagining that by any possibility either she or Lady Julia could have prevented the marriage; the resolution of her son could not be shaken, and firmly, but respectfully, he intimated his wish that, as soon as was convenient, his mother and sister would take up their abode elsewhere.

The dismay of Lady Marwood knew no bounds; but as any open quarrel with her son would have deprived her for ever of assistance in pecuniary matters, she very wisely resolved, at least in appearance, to submit with a good grace. But in the pitiless rancour with which she heaped the most bitter reproaches upon her daughter's head, did Lady Julia reap the first-fruits of the crime she had committed. During the few days that elapsed while the point of their future residence was in debate, her life was really almost unbearable; and the only mitigation of her discomfort was the prospect of, at all events, not being doomed to a lasting *tête-à-tête* with her mother, as, after endless discussions, it was finally decided that Brighton should be the place of their abode.

Brighton in August certainly did not promise much; but any thing was preferable to the solitude of the country to Lady Julia;

and Marwood Castle was so particularly hateful to her perverted taste, that she hailed with joy the arrival of the day which was to see them installed in a comfortless lodging-house at a disagreeable watering-place.

Immediately upon their arrival at Brighton, the two ladies devoted themselves to the discovery of means whereby they might contrive to procure some amusement, and which might render them independent of each other's society. Lady Marwood, depositing her stately form in a fly, went to make a tour among the whist-playing dowagers; while Lady Julia betook herself to the Chain Pier and the libraries, to ascertain distinctly who were come to undergo a course of the Carlsbad waters, or a daily immersion in the sea.

The sun blazed in all its glory, the waves glittered, and the white sails glided by; but all looked terribly blank to Lady Julia. Human forms were all she wanted to see, and

no human forms appeared, except such as brought disgust to her fastidious eye. There were multitudes of nurses, and swarms of children, with an endless variety of old maids and invalids, boarding-school misses, and smartly-dressed shopkeepers; but not one being whom she had ever seen before, or who promised to be an agreeable or profitable acquaintance.

Disgusted with her walk, Lady Julia directed her steps towards the Steyne; and, entering one of the libraries, put her name down as a subscriber, and took the opportunity of looking over the list of those who had done the same. But whenever she imagined she had discovered an acquaintance, it was but to hear from the circulator of embossed letter-paper, and books of trash in three volumes, that "they had just left." It was very odd, just in that particular month of August nobody was ill; or if they were,

they did not seem to consider Brighton as likely to conduce to their recovery.

In despair, Lady Julia restored the book to the bowing librarian, who had been trebly attentive since he had contrived to read "Lady Julia Manvers," though the writing was turned upside down.

Just as Lady Julia was preparing to leave the library, her attention was arrested by a little woman who stood opposite to her, apparently intent upon watching the moment when Lady Julia should become sufficiently aware of her presence to enable her to make a most profound courtesy. This she performed in so sudden a manner, that Lady Julia was almost startled into forgetting to make an adequate return for the unexpected compliment. For a moment she remained staring at her, with a firm belief that it was for the first time; but as the diminutive stranger approached, and announced herself

as “ Mrs. James Carmichael, who had the honour of making her acquaintance some three or four years back at the German Spa,” Lady Julia called to mind that there had been a sort of half-acquaintance with a little restless woman with grey hair and a pink lining to her bonnet, who always insisted upon presenting “ her ladyship ” with the glass of water specially prepared for herself.

At another moment, perhaps, Lady Julia would have contrived to forget that she had ever seen her; but now, wearied with the idea of having nothing better to listen to than Lady Marwood’s reproaches, any one who could put her *au fait* as to the gossip of the place or the chance of amusement appeared a desirable acquaintance; and she, therefore, suffered the approach of Mrs. Carmichael, who, on her side, was so enchanted at the opportunity that presented itself of improving her acquaintance with a great lady,

that she actually followed her from the library, and, fidgeting up to her side, insisted upon entering into conversation.

“ Well, to be sure, these watering-places are very delightful: one meets such good society in them.”

Lady Julia only bowed.

“ Now, who'd have thought,” continued Mrs. Carmichael, nothing daunted, “ that I should be lucky enough to renew our charming Wiesbaden acquaintance? Delightful place that was! I was there again last year. I don't know if you know Mrs. Joseph Carmichael, my sister-in-law? You do not! Ah! more's the pity; for she is such a very superior woman: but mind, if you only hear her called Mrs. Carmichael, you must not confound her with my other sister-in-law, Mrs. John. Sad confusion it makes sometimes, all our names beginning with *J*. I am sure I shall be most happy to introduce Mrs.

Joseph, who is staying here now for the benefit of the sea-baths for her brother-in-law's sister, Miss Hilton—a very charming girl. She is the daughter of a clergyman near Torquay—a most respectable family! It was too relaxing for her—I mean the Devonshire air; so they have brought her here for a little bracing, as the family is rather consumptive—that is, Mrs. Hilton, the mother, was: for the Hiltons are the finest family, perhaps, you ever saw. Mr. John Hilton, particularly, he's six feet two at the very least; and such a head of hair, and not a little proud of it, he is as——”

“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Carmichael,” interrupted Lady Julia, with somewhat a stately air; “but I must leave you now, as this is not my way home.”

“Oh! never mind that,” quietly replied Mrs. Carmichael; “I'll walk home with you. I don't mind a good long walk, though my

legs are none of the longest. Well, to be sure, to think of our meeting again! The place is very dull now, but it will soon be better. I am only staying here with the Joseph Carmichaels till the Eustace Lorraines come. I expect them every day, and then we shall have some gaiety. Such a fine young man as Eustace Lorraine does not visit Brighton every day. Why, it will make quite a stir in the place. You didn't happen to meet him in Paris last winter, did you? He was all the rage there, I hear—dining with the king and queen, and dancing with all the princesses—enough to turn any man's head. But Eustace knows what he's about. None of those foreign ladies will catch him, I can tell them."

"Pray, who is Mr. Eustace Lorraine?" Lady Julia condescended to inquire, as she quietly walked past her own door without appearing to perceive it.

“What! you don’t know him? Oh! I shall be most happy to introduce him as soon as ever he comes. He’s a nephew of mine” (Lady Julia turned aside her head to conceal a look of disgust); “that is, not rightly a nephew, for in fact he’s no relation at all of mine” (Lady Julia’s face brightened up again), “but a sort of a connexion,—that is, his father and Mr. Carmichael (Mr. James Carmichael, I should say—my poor, dear husband was only the second brother of four) were very old friends; and a good, kind-hearted man was old Eustace, as ever lived. Well, he died, as we must all do one day, and left a fortune of between seven and eight hundred thousand pounds to his only son; and my poor, dear husband was left guardian to the boy, and well he did his duty to him.”

“Was he very young when he lost his father?” inquired Lady Julia.

“Just turned five years of age; and his

sister, a year younger; and a very handsome fortune she has besides, and all in her own power. Well," continued Mrs. Carmichael, delighted to find Lady Julia had not yet reached her home, "sure enough, it was a great responsibility; but my poor, dear husband did his best; and as little Eustace had no relations to interfere with him, he thought it would be better just to add something to his name that would give it a finish—for John Eustace sounded so very plain; so we fixed on the name of Lorraine, and had him christened over again with his sister, a sweet girl, Bessy Lorraine, and so much notice as she was taken of in Paris last year by all the dukes and duchesses!"

"Is she pretty?" asked Lady Julia.

"Why, yes. She has a beautiful skin, and sweet blue eyes. She is a little short, but she is a beautiful dancer, though rather thick-legged; but gowns are worn so long now, it

is no matter ; no one sees what feet any one has, unless one pulls up one's gown, as I have a bad habit of doing ; but the sea-sand destroys one's hems, and one must save somewhere ;" and Mrs. Carmichael glanced downwards upon her cotton stockings and thick prunella shoes laced up the middle. " One can't do every thing on six hundred a-year. But Bessy need not mind if *her* gown does trail in the mud, she's rich enough to buy a new velvet every day if she likes it. After all, money is a great thing."

Lady Julia thought so too, and endured with a most marvellous patience the tedium of a full hour's further conversation with Mrs. Carmichael ; during the course of which she ascertained that Mr. Eustace Lorraine was the only son of Mr. John Eustace, a retired manufacturer of pins and buttons from the good town of Birmingham ; that he had been educated at Eton and Oxford (or, as Mrs.

Carmichael insisted upon calling it, "the university"); and that he was master of boundless wealth, and had but his sister Bessy as "an incumbrance."

This all sounded very well; and Lady Julia, who had her interest extremely at heart, and a due regard for the value of money, decided that it would be well, at least, just to see what Mr. Eustace Lorraine was like before she gave up the honour and delight of Mrs. James Carmichael's acquaintance. She, therefore, became wonderfully communicative and very inquisitive; and having ascertained that her new friend was extremely fond of a rubber of whist, saw clearly that it would not be any matter of great difficulty to induce Lady Marwood to become acquainted with the little, restless, chattering woman; from whom she parted with a degree of urbanity that sent her trotting home in delight, to recount to Mrs.

Joseph Carmichael, her sister-in-law, and Miss Hilton, the sister-in-law of Mrs. Joseph, what a charming, condescending young lady was Lady Julia Manvers.

CHAPTER XV.

THE adventure of the morning had filled the ever-active mind of Lady Julia with bright visions of the future; and already, in perspective, she beheld Mr. Eustace Lorraine sighing at her feet, and laying his thousands and tens of thousands at her disposal. She had made herself acquainted with every detail of his fortune and family; and long before Mrs. Carmichael had finished the elaborate descriptions, in which she delighted, of the splendour of his house on Carlton Terrace, and the grandeur of the park in Bedfordshire, which he had purchased just before

he went abroad, she had determined, that if in person Mr. Eustace Lorraine was tolerably presentable, she would not hesitate to accept of the proposal he would undoubtedly make for her hand.

Every thing appeared to favour Lady Julia's plans ; and she now rejoiced that, from the deserted state of the town, she would have more leisure to devote herself to their accomplishment. For the first time in her life she condescended to feel interested in the whist perplexities of her mother, and inquired anxiously what prospect there was of her being able to establish her nightly rubber.

“ Very little, indeed,” said Lady Marwood. “ It seems to me that every body went away exactly as we arrived. It is really rather hard that I cannot even make up a rubber here ; but there are Lady Jones and Mrs. Trevylian, who never were ill before in

their lives, both laid up. With them I should have been sure of a table."

"Is there no one else?" asked Lady Julia. "Surely there must be three other people somewhere who can play."

"No; there is no one else who plays my stake, and I make it a point always to play the same. Lady Dorothea Campbell and Mrs. Bingham are the only people I can find. Now, if you would make a fourth, we might do very well."

"Nothing shall induce me to touch a card!" said Lady Julia, with a most determined air. Satisfied, however, that the game was in her own hands, she allowed Lady Marwood to continue her lamentations for two whole days, and the third saw Mrs. Carmichael in her best turban and black satin gown admitted to the honour of forming a fourth at guinea whist.

The poor woman was in ecstasy. She de-

lighted in great people, and, simple and honest, took no pains to conceal the pleasure it gave her to be received on terms of intimacy by them ; and not even the spiteful sneers of Lady Dorothea, or the undisguised contempt of the rich Mrs. Bingham, could prevent her informing Lady Marwood, half-a-dozen times in the course of the evening, that never before had she played higher than half pounds ; and that it was entirely to please her and her sweet friend Lady Julia, who had made a point of her doing so, that she now deviated from her rule.

Lady Julia would have preferred not being mixed up publicly with the introduction of Mrs. Carmichael to her mother, for she wished to avoid the scrutinizing eye of Lady Dorothea, a most venomous old woman, always ready to detect and mar a flirtation. But she might as well have endeavoured to stop the course of the waves as they rolled over

the beach, as to restrain the untiring loquacity of Mrs. Carmichael, who kept up an incessant fire, and so bewildered the faculties of Lady Marwood at last, in endeavouring to impress upon her the various degrees of affinity between the John, James, and Joseph Carmichaels, and all their belongings, that she not only twice trumped her partner's best card, but actually forgot to mark the honours, though she really had them.

Lady Julia sat near in fear and trembling. Every moment she expected that the history of the Eustace Lorraines would come forth. Nor was she long deceived; for Mrs. Carmichael, who seemed to value herself extremely upon being, as she called it, "a sort of relation" to them, never allowed herself a moment's repose until the whole party was in full possession of what Lady Julia would fain have concealed from every ear.

How she could for a moment have imagined the possibility of such a thing as Mrs. Carmichael's silence upon any point appears incredible ; but such was her vexation when, having listened to the description of Mr. Eustace Lorraine, Lady Dorothea calmly observed, " that it was a fine fortune to have made by pins and buttons," that for a moment Lady Julia almost determined to give up her meditated attack upon the young *millionaire*.

Full of disgust, Lady Julia retired to her room ; but the next day her respect for riches returned in full force, as, sitting at her window, she watched the glittering equipage of Mr. Lorraine as he drove his curricule up and down before the windows.

It was his first appearance at Brighton, and Lady Julia, with much anxiety in her countenance, concealed herself behind the curtain, and prepared to take a view of her future victim as he passed.

Upon the first turn, Lady Julia decided that "the man was atrocious." Her hopes fell down to zero as she espied the broad pink cheeks and flaxen whiskers of Mr. Eustace Lorraine. On the second, as she glanced over him, and perceived the bright velvet waistcoat and massive chain, she thought, perhaps, if he was better dressed, it would soften down his personal attractions so as to make him presentable ; and the third turn convinced her that, if he were judiciously shaved, and had his hat placed straight upon his head, and kept his elbows a little depressed, he really might be reduced to something bearable enough to sit beside in so handsome a curricula.

Before the moment could arrive when for the fourth time Mr. Lorraine must pass before her, Lady Julia had glided down stairs, for her quick eye had detected the little, ambling step of Mrs. Carmichael, who, with her

gown carefully tucked up all round, was making her way along the road. In a few minutes she contrived to join her, as if quite accidentally; and before their walk was concluded, her introduction to Mr. and Miss Lorraine had taken place in due form.

It was an interesting moment to Lady Julia when Mr. Eustace Lorraine, having dismissed his currie and outriders, took his place by her side, and continued for some time walking up and down the sands, little imagining that it was a sort of probationary interview, and that each word he uttered brought him nearer or drove him farther from the honour of becoming the husband of Lady Julia Manvers.

No one ever embarked in a speculation with more certainty of success than did Lady Julia, as far as her own opinion was concerned; and her coolness and tact were never for a moment disturbed during the early part of a flirtation. She, therefore, did not

in the least doubt the impression she should make on Mr. Eustace Lorraine; her chief fear arose from the difficulty there might be in rendering him sufficiently presentable not to incur the fear of ridicule.

Mr. Lorraine's first appearance certainly was not prepossessing. His dress and manner bore undeniable symptoms of that most detestable of all looks called "knowing;" his hat was knowing, his coat was knowing, and the very way in which he sat in his curricule, and drove his really beautiful brown horses, was knowing, or intended to be so; and for the first few moments it seemed as if nothing ever could make him look like a gentleman. Yet there was nothing except his enamelled chain that another might not have worn with impunity. The same things had they belonged to Gerald De Grey would have been perfect. But circumstances were singularly against Mr. Eustace Lorraine ever

having a distinguished look. From head to foot he was a little too broad every where. If he could have been pulled out like an opera-glass he might have made a good-looking man, but, alas ! that was impossible ; and he was doomed to remain exactly as one might imagine a baby would look if it could grow up some five foot four inches in height without the expression of its countenance undergoing any change.

When Lady Julia first obtained a nearer view of Mr. Lorraine, his very pink fat cheeks and very white hair positively disgusted her. But as she listened to his conversation, her ideas began to change. He spoke better than he looked ; and, had it not been that he twice called her “ my lady,” and perpetually referred to “ the Marquis of this, and the Marchioness of that,” whom he had known in Paris, he might have passed very well, “ considering that he had so much

money." Upon the whole, Lady Julia made up her mind that, with a little good management, he would do well enough for a husband.

Bessy Lorraine was a softened image of her brother, of whom she appeared extremely proud. It was to her that Lady Julia deemed it prudent to address her most marked civility; and they parted mutually pleased with each other. From that day the spirits of Lady Julia began to revive. Every moment was spent in improving her acquaintance with the Lorraines; and the delight with which Mr. Eustace repeated the words "Lady Julia" a hundred times oftener than was necessary, very soon inspired her with the hope that at last she had found something to compensate her for her numerous disappointments; and that, if some little peculiarities in her new admirer did sometimes jar against her own ideas of good taste, they would be counterbalanced in the

eye of the world by the overwhelming fortune of which she should become the mistress by marrying him.

As their intimacy increased, she became aware of many good qualities which had at first been thrown into the shade by a strong desire of aping the manners of others, which is a very prevalent mania in people like Mr. Eustace Lorraine. But, though he certainly appeared to bow with some servility to rank, and what he called fashion, he was at heart an honest and independent man; and the kindness with which he treated the restless little Mrs. Carmichael as she fidgeted along by his side, in her pink bonnet and well displayed prunella shoes, spoke much for the amiable feelings and good disposition of the over-smart young man, who would have esteemed it a great misfortune could he have discovered that there was a wrinkle in his coat or that the brilliancy of his boots

had been somewhat tarnished. But to Mrs. Carmichael he was always dutiful and affectionate, and never for a moment seemed to forget that she had acted the part of a mother to him.

It was not surprising that the old lady should regard him with such fondness. In her eyes he was all perfection; and his quiet and submissive sister was to her as a daughter; and the proud and happy little woman trotted up and down the parade, admiring the splendid carriage and prancing horses as they passed, and describing minutely all the time to those who were within reach the birth, parentage, and education of "her nephew," as she first always called Mr. Eustace Lorraine, for no other purpose, as it seemed, than having to tell a long story to explain that he was not so.

CHAPTER XVI.

“WELL, my dear, I thought I never should have got here,” exclaimed Mrs. Carmichael one morning, as she bustled into Lady Julia’s sitting-room. “What an awful storm! I declare I couldn’t rest till I had been my rounds just to see how you all were. I never was so frightened in my life. La! if you could have seen me when our chimney-pot fell down last night. I was sitting with Mrs. Joseph Carmichael over the fire, just talking quietly of different matters—(Joseph, you know, is gone to town just to see after that business of old Carmichael’s; I always

call him old Carmichael, because you see, he was the oldest of four, but he was but six years older than my poor dear husband) —well, as I said, Mrs. Joseph and I were just sitting together taking our cup of tea, and talking of something that might happen, though just now I can't exactly mention it, —well, down came something over our heads like a clap of thunder,—and the nursery, you know, is next door but one to the drawing-room, and poor dear Mrs. Joseph was ready to drop, thinking of little Nelly and Thomas. Well, my dear," continued Mrs. Carmichael, after a moment's pause, just to take breath, "in a minute in came Mrs. Walker, the nurse, screaming to us not to be alarmed, for it was only the chimney-pot had fallen in the spare room, and that nothing was hurt but the rocking-horse, and his back was split in two—you know the children make it a play-room. La! I declare I couldn't draw

my breath for a quarter of an hour, I was in such a tremble!"

And Mrs. Carmichael, in a complete state of exhaustion, paused at last.

"You must have been very much frightened," observed Lady Julia, in her kindest tone; "and poor Mrs. Joseph, and Nelly, and Thomas, I hope they are not the worse for their alarm?"

"Oh no! thank you, my dear, we are all right again now, but it was an awful night. I never closed my eyes. To be sure how our little bit of a house did shake; but you were better off here; a row of houses keep themselves up, like a row of friends. If they stick together they are always safe enough. Were you terribly frightened, my dear?"

"Not much," said Lady Julia; "I always feel so comfortable at being on land in a storm, that it makes me sleep better than usual."

“ Well, I couldn’t close my eyes for thinking of the poor wretches at sea ; Lord help them, it must have been terrific, and so pitch-dark as it was,—you couldn’t see your hand. It’s blowing hard now, only you are sheltered here ; for as I came along I couldn’t keep my legs, I was almost down two or three times, and if it hadn’t been for a civil sort of man that kept me steady just coming round the corner, I should have been whirled off to a certainty. Bless me ! look at my bonnet ! Well, to be sure, how the sea-air does take the colour out of pink satin ! Why, it was only the other day I had it done up at Mrs. Martin’s,—you know Mrs. Martin, my dear, a very tidy, cheap sort of milliner ; and as I was saying to her the other day, ‘ Why, Mrs. Martin, when one has the choice of an English or a French milliner, I think it’s the duty of a lady to stand by her own countrywoman.’

God bless me! what a head I have got," continued Mrs Carmichael, as, standing on tip-toes to try and see herself in the looking-glass over the chimney-piece, she endeavoured to collect her scanty grey hair into something like a curl on each withered cheek.

"Shall I send for my maid for you, my dear Mrs. Carmichael? I am afraid your walk has made you very uncomfortable?" asked Lady Julia, with much civility.

"Oh, dear no, thank you, my dear, I shall do very well. At my time of life one need not mind one's looks: if one just has a decent bonnet, that's enough. I do believe the wire is broken in the rim," she exclaimed, as she held up the dilapidated bit of faded pink satin, which had once been a bonnet. "Well, I can't help it, I must put on my new French straw, that Eustace brought me, to-morrow, while Mrs. Martin just tacks a new wire round this. There won't be

many people out to-day, I dare say: and yet it is fine, too, overhead. How grand the waves look rolling in! Well, after all, a storm is a fine thing, if it was not for all the mischief it does. But, bless me!" she exclaimed, as she approached the window, "what are all the people running about? Good gracious! something has happened! What can it be? I'll just step down, and ask the first person I can see."

And down ran Mrs. Carmichael to the road in front, the pink bonnet dangling by the strings, and making a violent effort to escape from the hand which not only held it, but endeavoured to keep all things right below, while the other hand grasped the little cap with roses, which had already detached itself, and was fluttering round her face, and sheltering itself among the grey curls which were scattered all over it.

For some time the power of the wind was too

great for the voice of the distressed but curious little being, who, sooner than give up ascertaining the point for which she had braved the pitiless storm, was obliged to sit down upon the ground in order to avoid the sudden inflation which might have carried her away altogether; but at last it seemed that she had gained the desired information, for she immediately appeared in the drawing-room, exclaiming,—

“Oh! my dear, how shocking! Make haste!—make haste!”

“What is the matter?” said Lady Julia, actually alarmed by the paleness of the agitated Mrs. Carmichael, who was tying her pocket handkerchief over her bonnet, and preparing silently, for once, for some expedition.

“For Heaven’s sake, my dear, get on your things! A great ship has struck on the rocks, and the poor creatures will be all lost if we don’t render them assistance directly. Put on

your warmest things in a minute, and we will call for Eustace and Bessy. Make haste!—make haste for Heaven's sake!"

At another time, the fate of the ship, and all that it contained, would have been of very little importance to Lady Julia; but she was afraid of displeasing the old lady by betraying indifference to what she seemed to think of so much consequence; and, besides, it would be a good opportunity of passing the day with the Lorraines, without appearing to seek it. Therefore, Lady Julia equipped herself as speedily as she could, and was soon on her way to the hotel, where, upon arriving, they were immediately joined by Mr. Lorraine, Bessy having declined accompanying them.

It was with some difficulty, even with the support of a gentleman, that they could make their way along the shore; and as they passed, traces of the devastation which the storm had caused every where met their view, and Mrs.

Carmichael declared, each time she could recover breath enough to speak, that "their chimney-pot was a joke compared to the misfortunes of others." Houses unroofed, windows blown in, chimneys fallen down, and the shore strewn with boats, timbers, and casks, all dashed to pieces by the force of the waves.

But as they approached the extremity of the east cliff, just beyond which lay the scene of the disaster, their thoughts were abstracted from all inanimate objects, and filled with anxiety for the fate of the unhappy creatures who, it seemed, were still on board the wreck. On all sides were seen groups of persons, principally sailors, running towards the shore; while the words "life-boat," "coast-guard," occasionally met their ears, as some with oars on their shoulders, others dragging along heavy coils of rope, hurried past them.

The agony of poor Mrs. Carmichael was

excessive ; and, toiling and struggling, she hastened on as if in her diminutive person lay the only chance of relief to the sufferers ; while the selfish Lady Julia, in reality totally unmoved, affected a violent interest in their fate, and at every increased gust of wind clung still closer to the arm of Mr. Eustace Lorraine.

Hurrying on, they at length reached the spot from which the wreck was clearly discernible. A little below the cliff lay the ship, almost turned upon her side, and apparently wedged in by the rocks beneath ; for she lay immovable as the furious waves dashed over her, now completely concealing her from the view, and then receding as if to gather fresh strength, and, for a moment, leaving her decks bare and glistening in the noon-day sun. Every thing seemed to have been washed away from them.

Even Lady Julia felt her heart sicken, as, upon descending the cliff, and coming more

on a level with the ship, the forms of human beings were distinctly seen clinging in every direction to the rigging, while more than one helpless object floated upon the waves ; at one time heavily, as if unconscious of the fury which dashed it against the sides of the ship ; while, at another, the whirl of the roaring waters gave to it the appearance of life ; then, struggling with the rage of the tempest, it lay darkly on the white-crested edge of the foaming surge for an instant, and the next, as the giant wave rolled over, disappeared for ever beneath it.

The shrieks of the survivors were borne upon the blast ; and poor Mrs. Carmichael, as she seemed to feel, for the first time, her own inability to be of any use, wept and prayed aloud for their rescue. Nothing could induce her to remain where she was, though the violence of the wind was such that it was only by clinging together that they could support themselves against it.

They reached at last the very edge of the

shore, and there, among the kind-hearted crowd which had collected, stood the only three persons who had as yet been saved. Out of ten who had left the ship in the morning, but three had reached the land. The boat had been swamped; and two men who had had strength enough to struggle through the waves, and were excellent swimmers, and a little boy, whose light form had been safely thrown upon the sands, were all that survived.

The ship was bound to the Brazils; and, besides the crew, contained a good many passengers, but now not a dozen persons appeared to remain in the rigging, and the cries of these every instant waxed fainter. How awful was that moment, when, amidst the mighty roar of wind and wave, the wail of the perishing mortals went feebly up to heaven, and within a few hundred yards stood crowds of their fellow-creatures mourning in the bitterness of their sorrow their own nothingness when opposed to the power of their Creator!

At such a moment, even in the coldest hearts, all thought of self is hushed, and the woe of others claims the undivided tear of sympathy. None could look unmoved upon such a scene; and, as the fury of the tempest continued, hope died within the breast of all who stood upon the shore. Even the sternest melted into tears as a louder shriek of misery reached their ears, and the disappearance of another form from the rigging told that one more soul had been called to the presence of its Maker. A shudder passed through the crowd, and old men and young, the withered grandame and the blooming girl, knelt together on the sands and prayed aloud for God's mercy on the afflicted.

But amongst all, the grief of the poor little boy who had been saved was the most touching. He had been sent out under the care of the mate, as his parents were in Brazil, and his protector was among those who had

perished by the swamping of the boat. He did not appear to think of himself, or to remember that he stood upon that shore without one person whom he could call his friend. His whole anxiety was for the fate of another little boy, who, with his mother, had been left in the ship. He had been his playmate on shore and his delight during the voyage; and the frantic manner in which he called upon "Henry," and prayed to God to save him, drew tears from the eyes of all who witnessed the agony of the child. Though worn out with fatigue no one could persuade him to leave the spot, and he stood with his dripping clothes and fair hair matted to his head, as though he could not feel the cold. Some one had given him a piece of bread, but he held it untasted in his hand, and stood with straining eyes watching the vessel, while the bright spot burning on his cheek shewed the intensity of feeling under which he laboured.

Suddenly a shout was heard from the right, and louder and louder grew the cry until it reached the spot where they stood. The crowd rushed to the point from whence it came, and as the people turned the corner of the cliff from whence the town was discernible, the foremost caught up the cheer which swelled till the raging of the storm seemed to hush its roar before it.

The life-boat had put off! After many ineffectual attempts the gallant crew had succeeded in launching it, and as it gained the open sea hope dawned upon the spectators. The struggle was fearful, and more than once an icy chill ran through all hearts as it disappeared from their sight; but again it rose upon the wave, and again the heavens rung with the shout of joy that burst from the multitude.

The brave crew seemed nerved with iron, as they strained against the gale that still

blew fiercely on shore. For more than an hour they appeared scarcely to have advanced from the point where they had at first been seen. But, as the day waned, the wind began somewhat to abate in its fury; and at last they approached the wreck, which was now more clearly discernible by the retreating of the tide.

In breathless expectation every eye was strained to catch the smallest movement. It seemed impossible to approach near enough to be of any use; but figures moved in the rigging, and at length a rope was seen extended from one of the spars, and by its tightening, those on shore knew that it was made fast below.

Three rounds of cheers followed this discovery; they were returned from the boat, and then all hearts stood still, as one more skilful or more daring than the rest prepared to descend. Soon the distance was shortened

between the wreck and the boat, which rose and fell as if heedless of the foaming breakers which dashed around.

“Oh, hold me up! pray hold me up!” exclaimed the little boy, as the fluttering of a woman’s dress was seen. “I do not see Henry! Oh! does any one see poor Henry? Will not God save him?” shrieked the unhappy child, as the slackening of the rope shewed that all who remained with life were contained within that one frail bark, that now appeared to have a still more difficult task to perform than before.

At length it was over, and amidst the cheers of the surrounding crowd, the gallant boat ran high upon the shore. In an instant hundreds rushed through the breakers to secure it; and all who had escaped once more stood upon dry land. The little boy was forgotten, till a shrill cry was heard above all other sounds. A pale and exhausted woman, bathed in tears, was

lifted forward. The child caught a glimpse of her face, and, rushing to her, exclaimed,—

“ Oh ! that is Henry’s mother ! He is drowned ! Oh ! where is he ? ” he continued, struggling up to the wretched woman.

She pointed to the wreck, and the boy threw himself into her arms in violent hysterics. Heart-broken as she was, the poor mother seemed to find comfort in the strange child’s grief. Was he not mourning for her own—her lost one ? And she pressed him to her heart, and from that day she took him to be her son.

CHAPTER XVII.

“LET me entreat of you to return home, Lady Julia,” said Mr. Lorraine, who, seeing that Lady Julia still kept her handkerchief to her eyes, imagined her to be deeply affected. “The scene has been too trying for you, and all anxiety is now over, for these poor creatures are evidently all that remained alive upon the wreck.”

“Poor souls,” sobbed the good Mrs. Carmichael, “what can we do for them? We must have a subscription. I suppose they have saved nothing. Let me ask them all about it,” she continued, pressing through the group which surrounded the sufferers.

Many were too much exhausted to speak, others seemed quite insensible, but three or four of the least injured appeared to have recovered their senses sufficiently to remember that they were utterly destitute, and were already endeavouring to awaken the charitable feelings of the kind-hearted amongst the crowd.

Mrs. Carmichael, who never could be quiet, immediately bustled up to them, and diving into one of her spacious pockets, produced a well-filled purse, the contents of which she began to distribute amongst them, her hands trembling with anxiety, and the tears running down her cheeks.

“There, my poor man,” she exclaimed; “and there—and there. And where is the poor woman and the little boy? Lady Julia, we must look after them.”

Lady Julia was standing a little apart, looking up with pretty helplessness into the

face of Mr. Eustace Lorraine, who thought he had never seen her look half so interesting. She started as the shrill voice of Mrs. Carmichael met her ear; but as she raised her eyes to the man who, with his hand extended, was soliciting her charity, she could with difficulty suppress a scream, as his swarthy and well-known features met her view.

Hastily retreating, Lady Julia almost dragged her astonished companions after her, and scarcely even could listen to the gentle expressions of regret with which Mr. Lorraine endeavoured to calm her agitation.

How much Lady Julia had risen in Mr. Lorraine's estimation within the last few hours! Her well-timed expressions of sympathy, her well-expressed sensations of horror, the pretty ignorance, and helpless fear, which seemed to render her quite dependent upon his protection, had made a deep impression on the susceptible heart of Mr. Eustace Lor-

raine, whose insight into character was not very remarkable.

As to poor Mrs. Carmichael, she wept and shuddered, thanked God for having spared her, and blessed herself for having come in time to relieve the immediate necessities of the sufferers—all in such rapid succession, that, mingled with lamentations for her pink bonnet, which had lost all its bows, and inquiries as to how her young friends felt, and whether they had caught cold, and wondering what Mrs. Joseph, and little Nelly and Thomas, would think of her long absence, she was positively unintelligible to her companions.

Fortunately, at that moment, neither of them were in a state of mind to pay much attention to her remarks. Mr. Eustace Lorraine was thinking of Lady Julia, and Lady Julia was thinking of the dark-browed ruffian, who seemed to have returned from the depths

of the ocean to fill her mind with fear and anxiety for the future.

Hastily taking leave of her companions, as soon as she arrived at her own door, Lady Julia hurried to her room to try and gain sufficient composure for mature reflection upon her future course. Was it possible that she never was to be at rest? The guilty seldom can be; but Lady Julia, as she shuddered at the thought of what might happen, felt but little compunction from the reflection, that the anxiety she endured had been fully merited by her. For years had that man been secretly the bane of her existence; and now, at the moment when she fancied that, by a master-stroke of policy upon her part, she had for ever freed herself from his odious presence, did he return, as if almost from the dead, to hold again over her head the sword which she had hoped had been struck for ever from his grasp.

The very name of Antonio struck terror to her soul. In early days, he had been in the service of Mr. De Grey, who had not scrupled to avail himself of the cunning and duplicity of him whom he knew too well to retain in constant attendance upon his person. An Italian by birth, though the chief part of his life had been passed in England, he seemed to retain much of the character common to his countrymen ; and, servile and sordid when his avarice could be gratified, he at other times gave way to bursts of passion and revenge which defied the control of reason.

Well did Lady Julia know, that in this man's keeping was a secret which, if divulged, would for ever drive her to seclusion and obscurity. For many years had she writhed in secret beneath his yoke, until the necessity of making preparations for the secret marriage of her cousin had induced her, at the instigation of Gerald De Grey, to seek his assistance. It

was through his means that the priest had been procured to perform the ceremony. From that moment, she felt herself secure ; as she knew that, rather than expose himself to the consequences which might attend upon such a discovery, he would accept of the offer that had been made to him, and take up his final residence abroad. With much difficulty, between herself and Mr. De Grey, the stipulated sum had been advanced ; and by the letters which she had received from her accomplice in wickedness, she imagined Antonio already far away.

Her horror at this man's unexpected re-appearance had almost deprived Lady Julia of her usual self-possession ; and the triumphant expression which had flashed in the dark eyes of the Italian as he recognised her, left her in no doubt that his extortionate demands would be immediately renewed. To meet them was not in her power. She had

literally beggared herself to satisfy his grasping avarice on former occasions; and she knew that, the fury of his passions once roused by refusal, he would have little scruple in divulging to the world what might not only have the effect of marring her present scheme, but also of ruining her for ever in the estimation of society.

That Antonio would remain upon the spot in the hope of extorting money from her, she had not a doubt; and in this opinion she was fully confirmed by perceiving, on the following morning, that he continued to linger in the neighbourhood of the house, evidently watching for an opportunity of seeing her. She did not know what to do. For some days she remained at home on the plea of indisposition.

Touched by her suffering, which he attributed to kindness of feeling for the unhappy creatures whose danger she had witnessed,

Mr. Eustace Lorraine was more than usually attentive. Every day he arrived, with deep anxiety painted upon his expansive countenance, and inquired after her health with so much interest in his manner, that others besides Lady Julia imagined that a warmer feeling than mere friendship prompted his attentions.

Poor Mrs. Carmichael was quite overcome with happiness, and, as usual, could not refrain from informing both parties separately of her views of the case. To Lady Julia all her remarks were most acceptable; but with her dear nephew, as she persisted in calling him, her observations, though to all appearance equally well received, were not quite so judicious in their tendency. In the simplicity of her mind, Mrs. Carmichael imagined that the only possible objection that could be made to a marriage which she looked upon as perfection, was the difference of age between the parties concerned. Eleven full years was

the lover junior to his mistress. In vain was the "Peerage" consulted. There was no denying the fact; and Mrs. Carmichael, dreading the influence which the reflection might have upon the mind of Mr. Lorraine, was perpetually bent upon keeping it alive in his thoughts, by labouring to prove to him that it was rather a good thing than otherwise.

Unfortunately Mr. Lorraine did not think so. Good at heart himself, he valued simplicity of feeling in others; and though, at the moment, he had not a doubt that Lady Julia was as innocent and unsophisticated as she endeavoured to appear, still the thoughts of the fourteen years she had been in the gay world (supposing her to have entered it at the usual age of eighteen) recurred unpleasantly to his mind. Was it possible that so fascinating a woman could have lived to the age of two-and-thirty and "have known no other love?"

The idea of a fresh, untutored heart was

a favourite one with Mr. Eustace Lorraine, who belonged somewhat to the romantic school. But his nature was anomalous. He had a most tradesman-like fear of being taken in — “done,” as he mentally expressed it, but only mentally, for Lady Julia’s hints, partly conveyed through Bessy, and partly insinuated with the most flattering and persuasive manner, had done much to subdue the inclination to *slang* with which Mr. Eustace Lorraine had arrived at Brighton. Already the glowing waistcoat and broad-linked chain had given way to others of more moderate pretensions ; he no longer appeared with a ruff of hair round his face, and a thing which had every appearance of a tuft of withered flax upon his chin, had vanished as if of its own accord.

It was wonderful to see the alteration in the man ; his coat was full an inch longer, and he actually looked as if he could breathe

in his clothes, which was a great relief to the painful sensations his first appearance formerly created.

It was a great pity to think that so much pains should have been thrown away ; and Lady Julia thought so too, as she gazed upon the improvement of Mr. Eustace Lorraine, and “bitterly thought of the morrow ;” for that evening was the last she could venture to remain in her room without exciting the observation of those around ; and already had she received more than one threatening scrawl that warned her some sacrifice would be demanded if she expected to escape from the thralldom in which she had been so long held by Antonio.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN the meantime Florence, whose very existence, had it not been for the inopportune arrival of Antonio at Brighton, would have been forgotten by Lady Julia, was passing the first weeks of her new life at Paris ; for, immediately upon receiving the letter which had annihilated all hope of forgiveness from her family, she had yielded to the solicitations of Gerald, and they had proceeded as far as that city.

At first their plan had been to stay there only a few days and then go on to spend the winter in Italy. But weeks had passed by, and still Gerald always found some reason

for delaying their departure. Florence never offered an opinion upon the subject. To her all places were nearly alike in point of interest. Her whole heart and every thought were centered in her husband. Full of remorse, she wept incessantly as thoughts of home rushed unbidden to her mind ; but with more tact than is usually displayed at so early an age, she forbore to dwell upon the subject when in conversation with Gerald.

It boded ill for the future, to see how already a sensation of fear seemed to mingle with the idolatry with which Florence regarded her husband. And yet his manner towards her remained the same, or so nearly the same, that even at times she questioned her own heart as to whether its trembling fears were justified by the very trifling difference she imagined she had observed. And the inquiry was generally answered in the negative, and then Florence would redouble

her tenderness and care for him whom she imagined she had injured by having for a moment entertained a suspicion of his affection.

Even in the short time that had elapsed since she had left her home, the character of Florence seemed to have undergone a change. In early days she had been impetuous, and, at times, self-willed, while her pride partook somewhat of the nature of haughtiness when checked or controlled. But now these feelings, if they still existed, were, for the moment, extinguished by the sense of degradation which the consciousness of her fault entailed upon her.

The indulgence of this feeling, and the open expression of it, though it would have endeared her to one of higher principles, and claimed for her an increase of respect, had exactly a contrary effect upon the mind of Gerald ; and in the first outset of her career, Florence threw away the only chance she possessed of gaining a lasting empire over

the heart of the fickle man who, from regarding her as a mere toy, the slave of a fleeting passion, might, by a proper assumption of dignity and determination on her part, have been led to take a more serious view of the position in which he had placed her. But, by her blind and implicit submission from the first moment, Florence continued to rivet more firmly the chains she had forged for herself.

Upon their arrival at Paris, though depressed in spirits, the novelty of the scene irresistibly attracted her attention, and she anxiously expressed a wish that while they remained in town, their time should be devoted to seeing all that was most worthy of remark. To this Gerald willingly assented; but when the time came for the execution of her project, Florence almost always found that it must be deferred to some future time, as Gerald had some excuse for not being able to accompany her.

It seemed at first extraordinary that he

should have so much occupation immediately upon arriving at a strange place ; but from the very hour of their marriage there had been in the tone and manner of her husband an undefinable air of authority, against which she felt it impossible to urge a wish. There was a cloud too, sometimes, upon his brow, an abstraction in his silence, for which she could not account ; and though, at times, he would return the fond caresses with which she strove to lure him from all thought of gloom, and be again the Gerald of former days, yet there was ever more of passion than affection in his words ; and those thousand little tendernesses, betrayed in a look, or breathing in a tone when the heart is overflowing with unselfish love, were wanting on his part. And even in those early days of their union the spirit of Florence mourned, and her heart pined, for a return of that devotion which it would not own was confined to itself.

The days passed on, and still Gerald did not seem inclined to leave Paris. Latterly he had been more than usually occupied, and the arrival of the post appeared always a moment of annoyance to him : to Florence it was ever one of sorrow. Every day Gerald received letters which she guessed to be from England, and yet never had she ventured to question him as to the nature of their contents. It was a point upon which he appeared particularly tenacious, and Florence, whose only thought was obedience, did not dare to make a remark.

More than once she fancied she recognised the writing of Lady Julia ; but Gerald made no mention of having heard from her, and what could Florence ask ? What now was she to her—to any one ? All had cast her off ; and, in increased dejection, the poor thing would sit with her eyes fixed upon her husband's face, and try to gather comfort from

the least gleam of pleasure which she traced upon his handsome countenance, while the sense of her own desolation forced the heavy tears silently down her cheeks.

"Always unhappy, dear Florence!" exclaimed Gerald, as, upon one of these occasions, he condescended to remark the traces of sorrow which were but too often evident upon her face.

"Not unhappy, dearest," said Florence, trying to smile; "I was only thinking of home."

"You are always thinking of home, it seems to me," replied he, more coldly. "I certainly should not find much to regret, if I were you, in not seeing a set of people who have behaved so ill to you. I am not quite so forgiving."

"I did not deserve otherwise: but still I cannot help thinking of them," said Florence, struggling to repress her tears.

"Well, we need not debate the matter now," observed Gerald, getting up and looking out of

the window. "I cannot bear to see any one always crying. It makes me quite ill."

"I am not always crying, dear Gerald. I am quite — quite happy," said Florence, following him; and, as she spoke, she put her arm through his, and looked fondly into his face.

A very pretty woman, in the most becoming dress, walked close by the window, and, looking up archly, passed on with a most coquettish smile. Gerald forgot to return the gaze of affection with which Florence dwelt upon his face, until a deep sigh from her roused his attention, and, as he turned, he saw the glistening of a tear beneath the long dark lashes that shaded her beautiful eyes.

"You look pale, Florence," he said, with somewhat more kindness in his manner. "Shall I drive you out of town for a little while? or, perhaps, you would rather stay quietly at home, and in the evening we can go to some theatre? You have not seen any of them yet."

“ I had much rather drive out,” exclaimed Florence, quickly. “ If you have time to-day, pray let us go.”

“ I think,” replied Gerald, looking at his watch, “ that it is rather late, after all, for a drive, particularly if we go to the play. I have so many letters to write too to-day.”

Florence made no reply, and in a few minutes Gerald was gone ; she knew not whither, nor did she dare to ask ; and, as he had desired, she stayed quietly at home, for she did not venture to walk out alone, and she sat at the window endeavouring to feel interested in watching the varied expression of the different faces as the people passed by.

Thus had most of her days been spent. How different had been her expectations and ideas of married life ! But yet she would not own to herself that she was disappointed.

Gerald returned to dinner, and appeared in better spirits than usual ; perhaps the idea of

passing the evening at a theatre, instead of having to sit at home as he had done ever since their arrival, might have had some little influence upon his manner. Florence, on the contrary, felt as if it was an evening thrown away; but, gentle and submissive, she endeavoured to enjoy what she imagined had been devised from a kind feeling; and, though she was not particularly amused, expressed herself affectionately, and appeared grateful for Gerald's anxiety that she should derive pleasure from the performance. But the sound of gaiety fell with a chill upon her heart, and the first sensation of real pleasure which she experienced was when the fall of the curtain announced that all was over, and she prepared with joy to return home.

The house had been crowded, and they could only make their way slowly along the passage. Several gentlemen, all apparently foreigners, spoke to Gerald, and fixed their eyes with a most impertinent look of curiosity

upon the face of Florence, who clung the closer to the arm of her husband, and only whispered to him to get out of the crowd as fast as he could.

Just as they had reached the door leading to the stairs, a young and lovely woman, leaning on the arm of a distinguished-looking elderly man, extended her hand to Gerald, exclaiming,—

“ Mr. De Grey! how delighted I am to meet you! Where have you been? When did you come? I have not heard of you for an age. We are only just come from Italy.”

“ I am only passing through Paris, my dear Madame d’Osmond; but I will call upon you,” said Gerald, hurriedly, as he endeavoured to pass forward.

“ Yes, pray do; and come to my box to-morrow at the Opera, you know there is always a place for you. Duprez sings, and ——”

But perceiving, for the first time, that Flo-

rence was leaning upon the arm of Gerald, the lovely Frenchwoman drew back, exclaiming as she did so, in a whisper to her husband, "What an angel face!—Who can she be?"

"Hush, my dear Marie; you are so giddy, so indiscreet," replied M. d'Osmond, gently; "if you had only looked, you would have seen Mr. De Grey was upon thorns as you were speaking to him."

"I was so glad to see him, I did not think of any thing else," said Marie, with enthusiasm. "How handsome he looked!"

"Child!" exclaimed her husband, impatiently. "But come, the carriage is waiting."

And the laughing Marie, folding her shawl closely round her, looked up archly at her husband's face, and disappeared with him through the outer door of the theatre.

In the meantime, Florence was returning to her home in no very enviable state of mind. It was the first evening she had gone out in

public with Gerald, and his manner towards her had frozen up all the softer feelings of her heart. In vain she attempted to persuade herself that it was the rudeness of those with whom they had met which had produced so painful an impression upon her; when she reflected that one word from him who seemed so courted and well received on all sides, would have entitled her to an equal share of their respect, her heart swelled at the recollection of his hurried manner, and the evident anxiety he had shewn to avoid a protracted conversation with any of the acquaintance whom he had met. Why had he not introduced her to them? Why had they all stared at her in a manner, even the recollection of which brought a blush upon her cheek? Why had that beautiful Madame d'Osmond stopped short in her speech to Gerald the moment her eye had rested upon her? That they all condemned her she felt certain; and, in the humility of her heart, she

acknowledged that it was no more than she deserved. But Gerald! he who was the cause of her fault—why did he not support her? He upon whom her sole dependence was placed appeared to take part against her, to desert her at the very moment when his countenance and approbation had been most wanting; for, if his manner had been attentive and respectful, if he had seemed anxious that his friends should have been the same, Florence knew well that she would not then have experienced the feelings of discomfort and annoyance which she had done.

In vain did poor Florence struggle against the oft-recurring thought, that Gerald was ashamed of her. She had, in his eyes, forfeited her claim to respect, and he would not make any exertion to secure even the demonstration of it from others. And she brooded over this thought, until it became the one-predominant feeling in her mind.

For many days following, Florence did

not even express a wish to leave the house, and remained totally secluded ; but her cheek began so rapidly to fade, and her spirits to droop, though she shed no tears, that Gerald seemed at last suddenly to awake to the consciousness of his extreme neglect, and once more his manner became more kind and his absence less constant.

How grateful was the heart of Florence for the least word of affection! It appeared as if that night at the theatre had given her a new insight into the character of Gerald, and she trembled at the rapid strides her thoughts seemed to have made towards the belief that she had been mistaken in supposing he would always be as he had been before their marriage. Little did she imagine that his express object was to deprive her of the opportunity of making one single friend or acquaintance who might open her eyes as to his present course of life; and by the complete seclusion of her own, leave her very

existence unknown to three-fourths of the society which he delighted to frequent.

De Grey's original motive in endeavouring secretly to engage the affections of Florence had been one of interest, until, perplexed by the difficulties which obstructed his path, he had, at one moment, entirely abandoned the idea of making her his wife. Finding, however, that all chance of her marriage with Lord Saville was at an end, he had listened to the wily counsels of Lady Julia, and voluntarily rushed again into danger; for, unable to resist the violence of the passion with which the artless love of Florence had suddenly inspired him, he had urged her to a step which could not now be recalled.

The sole object of Lady Julia had been the destruction of a rival and revenge upon Gerald, towards whom her feelings continually fluctuated between recollections of past love and the bitterness of present hatred. No sooner had they left England, than she

cautiously communicated to him a pretended discovery with regard to the immense fortune which rumour had always assigned to Florence. Every post brought a gradual disclosure to the effect that, upon a more minute investigation than it had been possible to make before, it appeared that her fortune was almost entirely dependent upon her father's pleasure. This was always accompanied by exaggerated statements of Sir William Brandon's anger, and added to the harsh letter which Florence had received from him convinced Gerald that a temporary absence was the best course he could adopt.

Mr. De Grey had not calculated upon the severity with which Florence had been treated by her family. Any hope of reconciliation with them was evidently at a great distance, and the monotony of Cleaveden Abbey was too distasteful to him to allow of his thinking of making it his residence. The dissipa-

tion of Paris offered a much greater charm, than a life of retirement, and the task of soothing the sorrow and remorse of his unhappy wife. Fickle as the wind, his passion for her had already abated, and the extreme folly of a marriage which seemed to have ensured to him a life of restraint and privation was his constant thought.

Poor Florence! before three months had passed since she had taken the fatal step which should have bound his heart to her for ever, no one could more bitterly repent of what he had done than did Gerald De Grey.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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